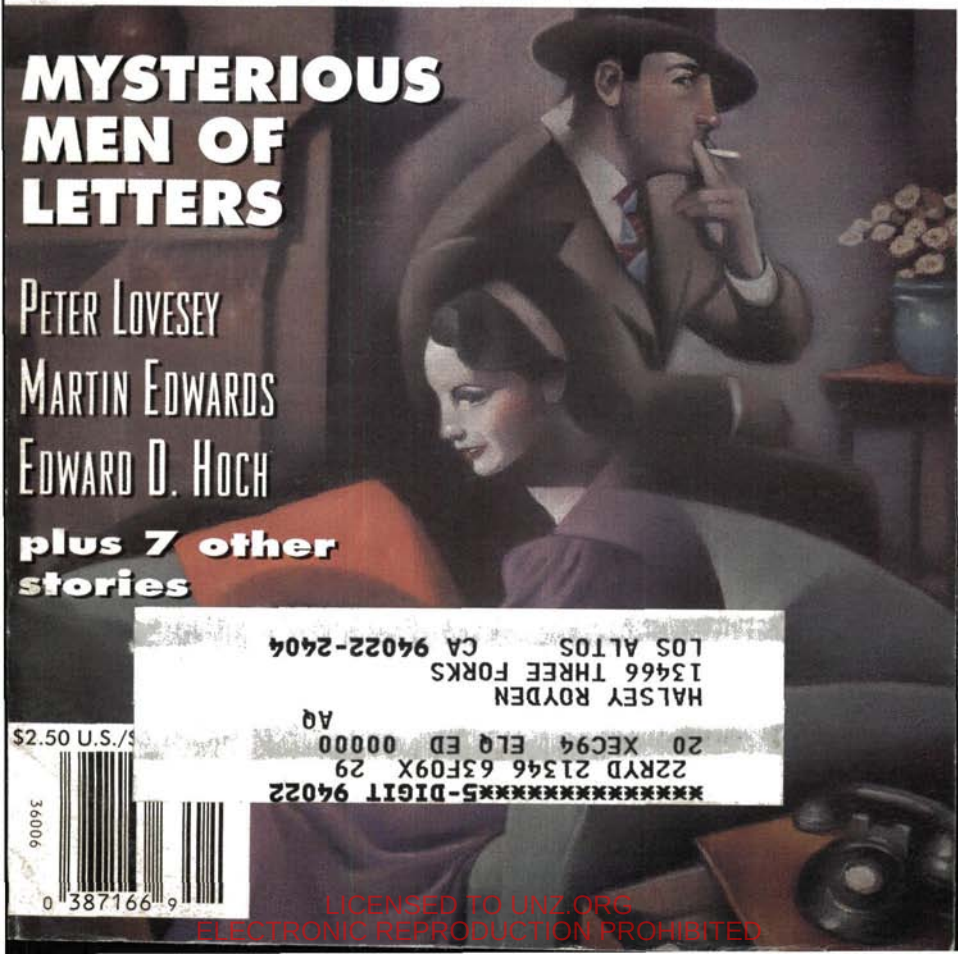
JANUARY 1994

# ELLERY QUEEN®

THE WORLD'S LEADING

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE



## MYSTERIOUS MEN OF LETTERS

PETER LOVESEY

MARTIN EDWARDS

EDWARD D. HOCH

**plus 7 other stories**

HALSEY ROYDEN
13466 THREE FORKS
LOS ALTOS CA 94022-2404

AQ

20 XEC94 ELQ ED 00000
22RYD 21346 63F09X 29
**********5-DIGIT 94022

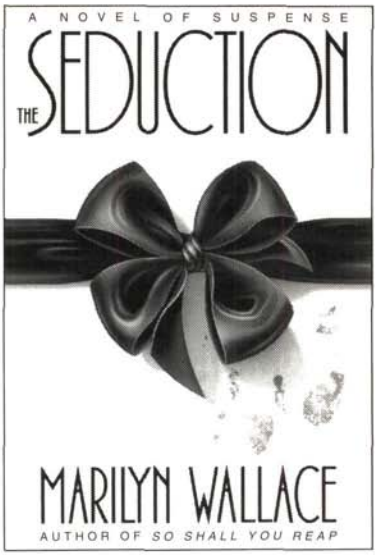
$2.50 U.S./

36006
0 387166 9

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

# Beware of stalkers bearing gifts.

When Lee Montana received the first anonymous gift, she dismissed it as a mildly intriguing mystery. But with the delivery of each new parcel she and her sister Rosie discover new heights in terror...and embrace their own plan for revenge. From the award-winning author of *So Shall You Reap* comes a chilling portrait of predator and prey locked in a deadly embrace in this unforgettable tale of psychological suspense.




*Also new from PERFECT CRIME:*

**THIN ICE**

BY **MEG O'BRIEN**

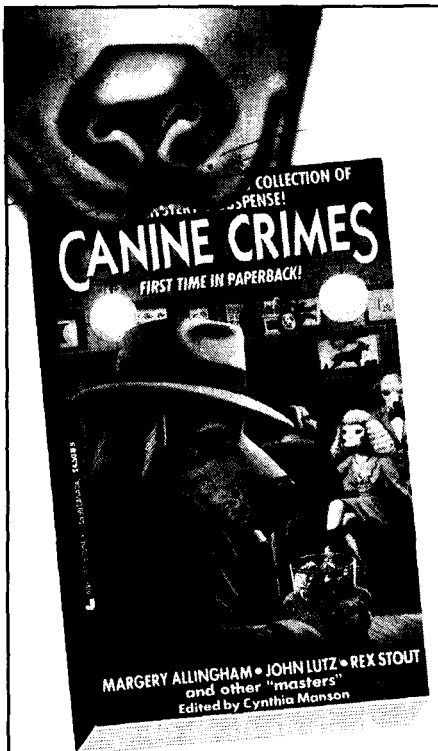
Available wherever books are sold

Doubleday

**PERFECT CRIME**

**America's most wanted list™**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




# MYSTERY LOVES A GOOD DOG'S COMPANY

Now for the first time in one volume, here are classic canine capers from the pages of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*. Perfect for anyone who loves dogs *and* loves a good mystery from these terrific authors:

**MARGERY ALLINGHAM ■ JOHN LUTZ ■ REX STOUT**
**EDWARD D. HOCH ■ JEAN POTTS ■ THOMAS WALSH**
**JOHN COLLIER ■ WILLIAM BANKIER ■ ENNIS DULING**
**RAY DAVIDSON ■ M.M. LaCOUR ■ DONALD OLSON**
**PATRICK QUENTIN ■ HERBERT RESNICOW**

**Edited by Cynthia Manson**

**THE BERKLEY PUBLISHING GROUP**

A Jove Paperback on sale in November/ $4.50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Contents

ELLERY QUEEN®
THE WORLD'S LEADING
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Passion Killers** | Peter Lovesey | **4** |
| **Home Is Where the Heart Is** | Nell Lamburn | **20** |
| **The Theft of the Canceled Stamp** | Edward D. Hoch | **34** |
| **One Life Too Many** | Donald Olson | **56** |
| **The Jury Box** | Jon L. Breen | **66** |
| **Rebound** | Roger Ormerod | **69** |
| **The Mystery Crossword** | Janet Lumiansky | **83** |
| **The Good Knife** | Suzanne Jones | **85** |
| **Footprints** | Barbara Owens | **94** |
| **Students of Disaster** | Michael Z. Lewin | **108** |
| **The Boxer** | Martin Edwards | **119** |
| **Don't Fear the Reaper** | David Dean | **132** |

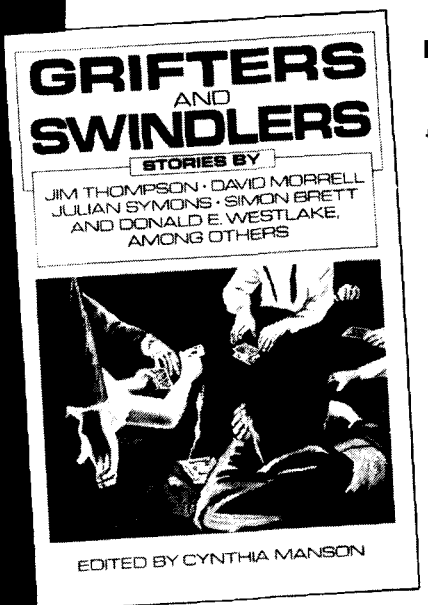
**Cover Illustration by Gary Kelley**

Dell Magazines, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036
Note: indicia on page 156

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE BEST OF THE LOWLIFE
# GRIFTERS AND SWINDLERS

Edited by Cynthia Manson




This entertaining book contains short stories about swindlers, grifters, and con men from all walks of life by a wide range of talent – including Simon Brett, Robert L. Fish, William Campbell Gault, David Morrell, Julian Symons, Jim Thompson and others.

**CARROLL & GRAF PUBLISHERS,INC**

Please send me _____copies of *Grifters and Swindlers*. I enclose my check for $_____ ($18.95 plus $1.50 for postage and handling for each copy). N.Y. State residents: add 8.25% sales tax to your order. Send orders to : Dept. 014EL Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc. 260 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10001

**Name**_____

**Address**_____

**City**_____ **State**_____ **ZIP**_____


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

**PETER LOVESEY**

*"Lovesey is one of the very best of the current generation of crime writers," the* London Evening Standard *said in a recent review of the author's novels. Mr. Lovesey's short stories too support the claim, and we think the following is one of his best . . .*

# PASSION KILLERS

## *by PETER LOVESEY*

The doorbell chimed.

In the kitchen, Gloria looked at the clock. She had to be out of the house by half-past, or she'd certainly be late for choir practice. The tea was too hot, so she added some extra milk to cool it, took a sip, and found it didn't taste like tea anymore.

Her mother was letting a few seconds pass before going to the door. She wouldn't want it known that she'd been behind the net curtain in the front room for the past ten minutes.

Presently Gloria heard the caller being greeted in a refined accent her mother never used normally. "Is it actually raining outside? I must tell my daughter. She's about to go to choir practice. She's a soloist with the Surrey Orpheus, you know. Gloria, my dear," the message came, still impeccably spoken, like a headmistress in school assembly, "it appears to be raining."

"I know."

Tonight the choir were rehearsing the Cathedral Christmas Concert. "Sheep May Safely Graze" was open on the kitchen table. Nobody seemed to mind that the piece happened to be secular, from the Hunting Cantata; it was so often played in church. Gloria, who would be singing the part of Diana, supported the League Against Cruel Sports and hoped people wouldn't say she was abandoning her

*© 1993 by Peter Lovesey.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

principles just to get out of the chorus. She got up and tipped the tea down the sink, ran some water over the cup and saucer, and reached automatically for the tea cloth, but the tea cloth didn't come to hand. Instead, of all things, she found that she was about to dry the cup on her mother's thermal knickers. They had been through the washing machine the day before and Mother must have hung them to dry on the towel rail, long-legged things in a hideous shade of pink described in the mail-order catalogue as peach-coloured. Even her mother laughingly called them her passion killers. Gloria clicked her tongue in annoyance and tossed them over the folding clothes rack where they should have been.

The visitor was Mr. Hibbert, the dapper man from number thirty-one. For the last two Fridays he had called on Gloria's mother, Mrs. Palmer, at precisely this time, just as Gloria was leaving for choir. The pretext for the visits wasn't mentioned, and Gloria hadn't asked. Her mother was only forty-one and divorced. She was entitled to invite a male friend to the house if she wished. It wasn't as if she was getting up to anything shameful. No doubt Mr. Hibbert had a perfectly proper reason for calling. True, Mother had put on her slinky black dress and sprayed herself with Tabu, but it was just to make herself presentable. It couldn't mean anything else. Mr. Hibbert had a wife and lived just four doors up the street.

At seventeen, Gloria viewed her mother's social life with detachment. Sometimes she felt the more mature of the two of them. Gloria worked in a small draper's shop in the High Street that had somehow survived the competition from department stores and mail-order catalogues. It stocked a tasteful range of fabrics, haberdashery, and wools. There were foundation garments discreetly folded away in wooden drawers under the glass counter. Nobody under forty ever went in there. Since leaving school Gloria hadn't kept up with her so-called friends, who had always seemed far too juvenile, obsessed with pop singers and boyfriends. Even though she was the youngest in the choir by some years, the others talked of her with approval as old-fashioned. The way she plaited her fine, dark hair and pinned it into the shape of a lyre at the back of her head strengthened the perception.

In the hall, she put on her black fitted coat and checked her hair in the mirror. She called out, "I'm off, then. Bye."

From behind the closed door of the front room, her mother called, "Bye, darling." It was a pity she chose to add something else, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terrible pity as it turned out, but she did. First she called out, "Gloria?"

"Yes?"

"If you're not in bed by midnight, you'd better come home."

The remark was meant to be funny and Mr. Hibbert showed that he thought it was—or that he ought to react as if it was—by laughing out loud. Then her mother laughed too.

Gloria was deeply shocked. She gasped and shut her eyes. There was a swishing sound in her ears. The humiliation was unendurable. That her own mother should say such a thing in front of a man—a neighbour—was a betrayal.

And the way they had laughed together meant that Gloria must have been mistaken about them. Mr. Hibbert's visit wasn't the innocent event she had taken it to be. It couldn't be. Decent people didn't laugh at smutty humour. By mocking her, they were affirming their own promiscuity—or at the very least their desire to be promiscuous.

She was disgusted.

To burst into the room and protest would only aggravate the injury. They'd tell her she had no sense of humour. They'd encourage each other to say worse things about her.

She turned towards the mirror again, as if the sight of the outrage on her own features would confirm the injustice of the offence. In the whole of her life she had never given her mother cause to doubt her moral conduct. She'd avoided drugs and smoking and she'd never allowed a boy to take the liberties most other girls yielded blithely. Keeping her standards high had not been easy. She was as prone to temptation as anyone else. She'd had to be strong-willed—and put up with a fair amount of derision from so-called friends who had been less resolute when temptation beckoned. Having to suffer taunts from her own mother was too much.

Mind, she knew that her mother had a streak of irresponsibility. Ninety-nine percent of the time Mrs. Tina Palmer behaved as a mother should. But Gloria could never depend on her. A certain look came over Mother at these times, as if she'd just tossed back a couple of gins (in fact, she didn't drink). Dimples would appear at the ends of her mouth, her eyes would twinkle, and then she was liable to do anything. Anything. Once, at a school speech day, seated in a privileged place in the front row because Gloria was getting a good-conduct prize, Mrs. Palmer had winked at Mr. Shrubb, the P.E. teacher, who was up on the stage with all the staff. Most of the teachers had noticed and next day it was mentioned or hinted at in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just about every lesson. Another time, bored in a supermarket queue, Mrs. Palmer had started juggling with oranges and had swiftly drawn a large crowd. Gloria wasn't among them. Too embarrassed to watch the display, she'd slipped out through an empty checkout.

At this moment she wasn't prepared to accept what had been said as yet another example of Mother being skittish. She was deeply humiliated and ablaze with anger. Her evening was ruined. She was in no frame of mind now to go to choir practice. How could anyone do justice to Bach feeling as she did? She opened the chest in the hall and dropped her music case into it.

She'd go out anyway. Anywhere. She couldn't bear to remain under the same roof while her feckless mother entertained her fancyman in the front room.

Her hand was on the door in the act of opening it when she noticed Mr. Hibbert's coat hanging on the antique hallstand that was Mother's pride and joy. It was one of those elegant navy blue coats with black velvet facing on the collar. Gloria had once thought men who wore such coats were the acme of smartness. Now she was willing to believe that they were all playboys. She was tempted to spit on it, or pull off one of the buttons. Then a far more engaging idea crept into her mind, a wicked, horrid, but deliciously appropriate means of revenge.

She would give Mr. Hibbert something to take home, an unexpected souvenir—the passion killers, those unbecoming thermal knickers of her mother's. At some point Mr. Hibbert would become conscious of something unfamiliar in his overcoat pocket and take it out. His immediate reaction on discovering such a revolting garment could only be guessed at, but he would surely think back and work out with distaste who the passion killers belonged to and try to interpret the message they were meant to convey, just as her mother would at first be mystified at mislaying her thermals and then mortified by the only possible conclusion—that her new friend Mr. Hibbert was a secret collector of women's underwear.

Blushing or glowing, she was not sure which, Gloria tiptoed to the kitchen and lifted the thermals off the rack, this time actually grinning at their unspeakable shape and colour. She folded them neatly so as not to make too obvious a lump. Then she went back to the hall and slipped them into the left pocket of Mr. Hibbert's beautiful coat: the left because the right already contained his leather

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gloves. She pushed them well down. In doing so, her fingertips came into contact with a set of keys. His car keys.

Now an even better idea dawned on Gloria.

How much more suggestive if the knickers were to turn up in Mr. Hibbert's car, say in the glove compartment on the passenger side, where his wife would very likely discover them for herself. The prospect was delicious: Mrs. Hibbert reaching in for a sweet, or something with which to dust the window, and pulling out another woman's drawers. Her wayward husband would really have some explaining to do.

It wouldn't be difficult. There were no garages in King George Avenue. The cars were parked in the street, and Mr. Hibbert's was the only silver BMW.

Gloria fished out the thermals and the keys.

She held the thermals at arm's length. The passion killers. Would anyone believe they belonged to her mother? She wondered. Better leave them in no doubt. There was a way to do it.

One of the drawers in the antique hallstand was full of wrapping paper and padded bags people had sent that might be used again. Mother, being economical, kept everything that might be used a second time. When she needed to send a padded bag, she would carefully tear the stamps off one of her collection and cover the old labels with new sticky labels for readdressing. Gloria selected one of appropriate size, folded the pants, and slipped them inside. She removed the stamps, but did nothing about the label, which still had her mother's name and address typed on the front. Just perfect. She didn't seal it, either.

As a precaution, just in case some nosy neighbour might see her in the street, she unpinned and unfastened her plaits. Nobody ever caught her with her hair loose. Like this, she suddenly felt a different person, not the high-minded young lady she liked to be known as usually, but a free agent.

She slammed the front door as she went out. The lovers could relax now, believing she was gone for at least two hours and a half. Sheep may safely graze.

The rain had stopped. Darkness had set in some time ago. The streetlamps in King George Avenue were more decorative than effective, but she spotted Mr. Hibbert's BMW parked opposite number thirty-one. There could be no question that it was his car because it was well known that he'd paid for a registration with his initials, HPH—a clear sign of vanity in Gloria's opinion. Nobody seemed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to be about, so she went straight across and tried the key on the passenger's side. It was a central locking system and she heard all the doors unlock. When she pulled open the door an interior light came on, so she got in quickly and shut the door and the light went out.

Simple.

The glove compartment opened at the press of a button. Inside were a couple of maps, a roll of peppermints, a half-eaten bar of chocolate, and some petrol tokens. She stuffed the bulky envelope inside and closed it.

Now what? There was a sense of anticlimax. Gloria hadn't thought how she would spend the evening now that she wasn't going to choir practice. To go back to the house was out of the question. She'd be a prime suspect if she did. It was a chilly evening. She'd sit here a moment and think.

She'd never been into a pub unaccompanied and she wasn't going to start tonight. She wouldn't feel very safe walking the streets for long. And there was no one she could visit.

The best plan was to go to a film. She'd walk down to the Cannon and find out what was showing.

She was on the point of leaving the car when she heard footsteps close behind. She glanced into the mirror mounted on the side, but saw nobody on the pavement, so she turned her head.

A figure was walking slowly along the centre of the road between the rows of cars. She couldn't see too well, but she was fairly certain that it was a male wearing some sort of crested headgear, a fireman's helmet, perhaps, or a policeman's.

Panic-stricken, she ducked right down with her head over her knees, hoping he'd walk past without looking in.

She could feel her heart thumping against her thigh.

Please, please go by.

The footsteps had the heavy tread of boots. They were agonizingly slow.

They stopped right next to the car.

She nearly died of shock when he opened the door on the driver's side and got in. The light came on in the car.

"Bloody hell!"

She remained quite still.

"Are you ill, or somefink?"

If he was really a policeman, he ought to have sounded more assertive, more in control, but she dared not check.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You just give *me* a nasty turn, any road."

She was petrified. He took a grip on the hair at the back of her head and pulled her upright.

She had another shock when she turned to face him. The crested helmet was in reality a punk hairstyle, a bright green Mohican tuft presently being squashed against the roof of the car. He was a youth of about sixteen. There were three silver rings through his left ear and a glittery stud through his nose.

He asked her, "This motor—is it yours?"

She shook her head.

"Your old man's? What you doing, then? Nicking stuff? You deaf, or somefink?"

She succeeded in saying, "Who are you?"

He said, "I asked you a question."

"You asked about five questions." She was beginning to feel safer with him. She was close enough to see that he was just a boy.

"I don't know you," he said, as if the fault were Gloria's. "I don't know you, do I?"

She said, "If you pulled the door properly shut, this light would go out." Immediately she'd said it, she realized that she might be misinterpreted. She was only anxious that nobody should see her sitting in Mr. Hibbert's car, with or without a boy with green hair.

He closed the door and said, in the darkness, "Want a smoke?"

She said, "Look, this is someone else's car."

"He won't come out. He's watching telly in one of them houses, I bet. Long time since I tried a BMW." He put his hands on the wheel and it clicked. The steering column must have locked. "Bleedin' hell."

Gloria said, "Mind your language."

"Sod off."

At least she'd registered disapproval.

"If it ain't yours," he said, "how did you get in?"

"With the key. I, um, nicked it," she added, to forestall the next question.

"Jeez. Where?"

"From his pocket."

"Cool." He didn't ask about the circumstances. Instead, he said with admiration, "You're class."

She liked that. Nobody—certainly no boy—had ever referred to her in quite those terms before.

"What's your name?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Gloria."

"Gloria—blimey. I'm Mick. Want to go for a ride, Gloria?"

"What do you mean—in this?"

"What else? You just said you got the key."

"Can you drive?"

"I wouldn't be here, would I? Give us the key and I'll show you. I could start it easy, but the wheel's locked."

He was a joyrider. He'd walked up King George Avenue trying the doors of all the cars to find one open and it had happened to be Mr. Hibbert's.

The keys were in her lap. Mr. Hibbert's keys. Mr. Hibbert, who had laughed at the idea that she might spend the night in bed with someone. She handed them over. "Just a short ride."

He slotted the key in and turned it to free the steering wheel. The engine started the first time.

"Nice motor," said Mick, switching on the headlights and revving the engine. He released the handbrake and they moved out of line and cruised quite quickly to the end of King George Avenue, where it met the High Street. Gloria felt an upsurge of excitement. She was joyriding—and in Mr. Hibbert's car.

"Open your window. Get some breeze through."

It worked electronically. She found the button and pressed. The wind was noisy. She glanced at the instruments and saw that the car was doing sixty in a built-up area.

"We can have a burn-up on the bypass," said Mick apologetically. "These can do a ton, easy." He switched the radio on. A Mozart piano concerto was being played. "God 'elp us. See if you can get somefink with a beat."

She tried the controls, found some rock music, and turned it up loud.

"Ace," said Mick.

They were flashing past parked cars at reckless speed. Gloria was scared, but enjoying it in the way you can enjoy a rollercoaster ride. She wasn't even using the seat belt. That, to a full-blown punk like Mick, would surely have been chicken.

They succeeded in getting to the bypass without being stopped by the police. On the triple carriageway, Mick moved out to the fast lane.

"Let's see what this heap can do."

Gloria's skin prickled. To think that this could have been choir practice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The wind stung her face and stretched her hair in what felt like a comic-strip illustration of speed. Mick was steering one-handed, with his free hand resting on her thigh. She didn't mind.

They overtook everything. When anyone had the temerity to block the fast lane, Mick used the horn and headlights together. They weren't held up long.

Gloria looked at the speedometer and saw the needle hovering near 110. They passed the sign for a roundabout. She drew it to his attention in the most tactful way she could. "Let's go round and come back the other way."

"You go for this?" Mick shouted. "Does it turn you on?"

"It's magic."

The hand on her leg moved higher, exploring, but he had to use both hands to swing the car around the roundabout, the tyres screeching, and by that time Gloria had brought her legs up to her chest with her heels on the edge of the seat and her arms tucked around her shins. The one-handed driving was all very macho, but she felt it required Mick's undivided attention.

They raced back along the stretch they had just travelled. Someone in the fast lane refused to give way, so Mick overtook on the inside and made an obscene gesture as they passed. Gloria did the same. She had never felt so delinquent, or so alive.

"You know what?" shouted Mick.

"What?"

"You're neat."

"You're neat, too."

"I'll get you a present. What do you want—jewellery?"

She didn't know what to say.

"Somefink to wear? Leathers?" said Mick.

"There's no need," said Gloria. "You don't have to get me anything."

He reduced speed. They were coming to a feeder road that would take them off the bypass.

"Have you got a telly? Portable?"

"Look, I don't want anything, Mick. If you want to get me a drink—"

"A drink? All right. You like fizz?"

"Fizz?"

"Champagne. You can have champagne if you want."

She laughed. "All right." If he wanted to be extravagant, she'd settle for a glass of champagne. Immediately she wondered if she'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made a wise choice. With some drink inside him, Mick might take even bigger risks with the car. Maybe she'd be wise to walk home.

They cruised at a mere seventy along the main road into town, ignoring several pubs. Gloria decided that Mick was driving them to his favourite haunt, some place where punks and rockers met, with wood floors and music and one-arm bandits.

In the High Street, he slowed and turned his head, as if looking for someone. He cruised quite slowly, past Woolworth's and Boots and the laundromat. Gloria didn't know of any pub along here. There was just the County Arms Hotel, with four stars in the RAC Guide, and that, surely, wasn't the sort of place Mick would frequent.

Like a mind reader, he said, "We'll get it in the Wine Mart."

"Fine," said Gloria.

"Put your head down, right down, like you had it before."

"Why?"

"Why do you fink? We're going to ram-raid the place. These fings are built like bloody tanks."

She was horrified. "No, Mick!"

"Do what I say—if you want to keep your face." He spun the wheel sharply right.

She had a glimpse of the shop window of the Wine Mart straight ahead. She plunged her head between her knees. She felt the wheels mount the curb and then the terrific impact as the shop front was ripped apart. An alarm bell jangled.

Mick forced open his door and stepped through shattered glass into the shop's interior. Gloria sat up, twitching with fear and shock. The car's bonnet was covered in glass.

Mick was back, brandishing a bottle of champagne that he'd taken off a shelf at the rear of the shop. This was a nightmare.

Gloria said in a voice shrill with panic, "You're crazy!"

Mick shouted above the blare of the alarm, "Burst tyre. We got to run for it!" He opened the car door, grabbed Gloria's arm, and tugged her out. "Come on! Let's get out of here."

They abandoned Mr. Hibbert's car, still blocking the pavement with its front wheels inside the Wine Mart. Regardless of the people who must have heard and were certain to be watching from flats above the shops, Mick dashed up the High Street with Gloria following. At the first opportunity they turned left up a side street.

Gloria leaned against a doorway to recover her breath.

Mick swung around. "You can't stop here. We got to go on."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If she'd had any breath left, she'd have shouted back at him, told him he must be a head-case to have done such a thing, made it clear that she would never have consented to it. That—far from impressing her—it proved that he was a pathological idiot.

A police siren frighteningly close interrupted her resentment. She forced herself to run again. They were coming into a paved area where cars couldn't normally pass, but she was sure the police car would pursue them if they were spotted. A couple of derelicts shouted at them from a shop doorway. They'd seen the bottle that Mick was still carrying, and they were asking him to share it. Mick was too fast, but one of them stepped out to try and grab Gloria. He caught hold of her wrist with a filthy hand, and his face came close to hers, unshaven, bright pink, and foul of breath. She screamed, pushed at his chest, and managed to wriggle free. He stood in the middle of the walkway yelling obscenities as she dashed on.

Mick waited for her by the parish church beyond the shopping mall, a pathetic figure now with his stupid green hair in disarray like daffodil stalks after the flowers were picked. "Over the top, right?"

She nodded, too breathless to speak.

The wall around the churchyard was about four feet high. She put her hands on the coping and half-jumped, half-hauled herself off the ground. Mick shoved her backside unceremoniously higher and she scrambled onto the wall and jumped down. He followed, then stopped to pick up the champagne, which he must have tossed over first. Why he bothered with it, she couldn't imagine.

"Come on."

Stumbling between ancient headstones in the near-darkness, they made their way as well as they could across the churchyard to the accompaniment of the police siren. At one point Gloria thought she could make out the sound of running footsteps quite close, but Mick was unconvinced. He'd stopped from sheer exhaustion, leaning against a tombstone. "They'd have searchlights and torches if they was trying to follow us."

Gloria said, "I can't run anymore."

"Have some of this." He started fiddling with the foil wrapping on the champagne.

"I don't want any, you moron. I didn't want it in the first place."

He was loosening the wire around the cork. "You did. You said." He sounded like a six-year-old now.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I didn't know you were going to break into a shop to get it and ruin Mr. Hibbert's car."

The cork popped and Mick's hands were covered in froth. "Have a swig."

"I don't want any."

"I don't want any," he mimicked her. "Snotty-nosed bitch."

"I'm the one who stands to lose most," she pointed out. "I've never been in trouble with the police."

"Who says you're in trouble? We got away, didn't we?"

"Yes, but I took the keys from his overcoat pocket when he was visiting my mum. It's going to be obvious."

"He was visiting your house?"

"Yes, he's probably still there."

"What's he doing with your mum?"

"That's my business."

"Is he staying long?"

"I don't know—a couple of hours."

Mick fumbled in his pocket and produced the car keys, dangling them in front of her face.

"You've still got them?"

"Now who's a moron? You can stick them back in his pocket and he won't never know."

"Give them to me."

He closed his fingers around them and hid them behind his back. "Who's a moron?"

"I'm sorry, Mick. I didn't mean that. Please."

"Come here."

"Mick, I said I was sorry."

He curled his finger, beckoning.

She felt her stomach clench. He wanted her. This was what it had all been leading up to, the joyride, the ram-raid, the champagne. Almost every day of her life since she had first learned about sex she had tried to imagine how it would happen to her the first time—the situation in which she would consent. Never, remotely, had she pictured it like this, among the gravestones in the bitter cold, with the police searching for her.

She said, "There isn't time." She could have added that it was dangerous and squalid and unromantic, but those were concepts that would make no impression on a punk. In his scale of values they might actually be incentives. And—in spite of everything that had governed her life until this moment—Gloria herself was being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swayed. She was a different person now, a lawbreaker.

Impulsively she stepped towards him and offered her lips.

He jammed his mouth against hers so hard that their teeth scraped. She could feel his hand fumbling low down at the front of her coat.

He said, "Take 'em, then."

It was a moment before she understood that he was trying to hand her the car keys. He pushed them into her hand.

Then he drew back and so did she, bewildered. Apparently all he'd wanted was the kiss.

"You'd better leg it now," he told her.

"Yes."

"See you." He turned and walked away.

She put her hand to her mouth as if the act of touching her slightly numb lips would somehow preserve the kiss. She didn't want him to leave her. She knew it was the sensible thing, the safe thing, but tonight she'd stopped being sensible and safe.

"Mick!"

He turned his head and said, "Leave it out, will you?"

Despairingly, she echoed the words he had used. "See you."

He walked on.

She bit back her distress. If she really wanted to be accepted by people like Mick she had to be tough with herself. She left the churchyard by a different route from Mick's and—to borrow his terminology—"legged it" through the streets towards home. So much had happened that she hardly expected to see the houses still lit, but they were, almost every one she passed. She couldn't believe that Mr. Hibbert would still be in the house with his coat hanging in the hall, but in fact the entire adventure had lasted less than an hour and twenty minutes. It might still be possible to return the keys and pretend she had been at choir practice.

But when she turned the corner of King George Avenue she had a horrible shock. A police car was parked in the space where Mr. Hibbert's car had been. The police? Already?

In two minds whether to run back and search the streets for Mick, she stopped at the corner and waited, going over in her mind what she could say if the police were with her mother now. She was in an appalling position. If she told the truth, she'd have to betray Mick. Then it occurred to her that the police might not yet have connected her with the theft of the car. It was possible that they were there for no other reason than to inform Mr. Hibbert what had happened.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was going to have to find the courage to walk into the house and act as if she knew nothing at all. It was no use waiting for them to leave, because Mr. Hibbert was sure to leave as well. The only chance she had of returning the keys to his overcoat pocket was now.

With her heart pounding, she stepped up the street to the house. The light was on in the front room and she could hear the faint murmur of voices, but the curtains were too thick for her to see anything. Under the porch light she checked her clothes. Her shoes were muddy at the heels and her coat was dusty where she'd climbed over the church wall, so she did some rapid grooming with a tissue. She couldn't do anything about her hair; she'd just have to say that one of the plaits had come undone and she'd unfastened the other one. She took a deep breath, slotted her own key into the front door, and let herself in.

The coat was still hanging on the hallstand, but there were others as well. And she didn't have time to do anything about the car keys because the door of the front room opened and Mr. Hibbert came out, followed by a police sergeant in uniform.

"You must be Gloria," said Mr. Hibbert. "I've seen you several times, but we've never spoken. Your hair's different, isn't it?"

She murmured some bland response.

"Mrs. Palmer's daughter," Mr. Hibbert explained to the policeman. "Just back from choir practice, I believe." He sounded surprisingly chirpy for a man whose car had been stolen and wrecked.

Other people were coming out of the front room. Two women from up the street and old Mr. and Mrs. Chalk, from next door. Even the obnoxious Mrs. Mackenzie from the house opposite, a woman her mother detested. So many witnesses?

And now her mother was there. "Gloria, help Mrs. Mackenzie with her coat, there's a dear."

Nobody seemed unduly alarmed.

"I'll be off, then," announced the police sergeant, opening the front door. "Thanks for the coffee, Mrs. Palmer."

Gloria reached for the fur coat that she recognized as Mrs. Mackenzie's, just as Mr. Hibbert was lifting his overcoat off the hook. He was saying something to her mother about coming again. In a swift movement, using Mrs. Mackenzie's fur as a shield, Gloria succeeded in dropping the car keys into Mr. Hibbert's coat pocket. Only just in time.

"Goodbye all." He'd put on the coat and was gone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Some of the others were not so quick to leave. There was no sense of urgency. They were talking about what they would be doing for Christmas.

When Mrs. Palmer finally closed the door on the last of them, she breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Let's have a fresh cup of tea, love. Have you had a nice evening? You're back early, aren't you? What have you done with your hair? I rather like it down. It suits you."

"Mum, whatever were all those people doing here—and the police?"

"Didn't I tell you? This is the third meeting we've had. We're setting up a Neighbourhood Watch. You know—keeping an eye on each other's property. It's becoming essential with all the crime round here. Sergeant Middleton was telling us how dreadful it is. He's the community liaison officer. It's his job to advise people like ourselves how to get organised."

"That's why they were here?"

"Well, yes."

"Mr. Hibbert?"

"He *is* a neighbour, dear, and quite well off, I believe. He's got an interest in protecting his property. He's one of the moving forces. He's always the first to arrive."

"Yes, I noticed," said Gloria, wishing the earth would swallow her up.

The kettle had boiled. Mrs. Palmer made the tea. "Of course, that Mrs. Mackenzie from across the way came, and I'm convinced the only reason is that she wanted to see inside the house. She's so nosy, that woman. Do you know, when I made the coffee she insisted on coming out here to help me, as she put it. Of course, all she wanted was to get a look at my kitchen. Oh, and Gloria, darling, I'm *so* grateful to you for putting my thermal undies out of sight. Imagine if that woman had clapped eyes on them. I'd have died, I really would. I suddenly thought of them when she was opening the biscuits. The relief when I looked at the towel rail and they weren't there. I mean, they're not the most flattering things to have on display—my enormous bloomers."

Gloria tried to give the smile that her mother obviously expected.

Mrs. Palmer added, "Tell me, where did you put them, dear?"

The doorbell chimed. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# *SHADOWS IN THE HALF-LIGHT*
## *by ALFRED GRAHAM JONES*

(with apologies to Edgar Allan Poe and his Raven)

Once upon a midnight dreary,
When my eyes were red and bleary,
After reading much too much
Of Wimsey, Marple, Holmes, and more,
I was on the verge of napping
When I heard a gentle tapping,
A quiet but persistent rapping
On a pane of my French door.

Looking o'er, I gasped in wonder.
Were my senses torn asunder?
Was the lamplight on the window
Showing things that were not there?
Faces clustered in the half-light
Peered at me from out the moonlight,
Chilling me into a half-fright
As I sat frozen in my chair.

Was it mere imagination?
Just a weary brain's creation?
Nothing but hallucination
Dreaming up those phantoms there?
Did my tired eyes deceive me?
Would, or could, my friends believe me?
No, I thought, they'd only grieve me
On my loss of savoir-faire.

Was that a monocle that glistened?
Whose voice was that? I keenly listened.
"What ho, Bunter! Off we go."
It couldn't be! I know! I know!
Was that a meerschaum pipe a-glowing?
Did I hear Holmes's voice, all-knowing?
"The game's afoot!" My fright was growing
O'er those faces in the glow.

Was Watson's face there, red and sputtering?
Was that his voice, all gruff and muttering?
Who was that lady, hands a-fluttering,
Bonneted and gray of head?
Miss Marple? Surely not, I mumbled.
"Enough!" I cried aloud, then stumbled
As with the reading lamp I fumbled,
Switched it off and went to bed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** short story by

**NELL LAMBURN**

*Until very recently, British author Nell Lamburn lived in a thatched, beamed, converted farmhouse built in 1650 and complete with walled garden and a well in the sitting room. No wonder then that she understands so well the passion of the characters in the following story for the ancient cottages whose conversion is their life's work . . .*

# HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

***by NELL LAMBURN***

"The hearth," Godfrey Mannington would say, "the hearth is the very *heart* of the home. The bedroom may be the womb, but without warmth, without food, life itself cannot be sustained. The ancients knew that, of course. And revered them accordingly." He would smooth his fine narrow hand along the rough oak lintel: let it linger over the curved flank of the seventeenth-century bread oven, while his clients nodded and agreed and admired. How they admired! For to own a Mannington cottage was to own a living masterpiece indeed.

"How can you *bear* to sell!" they would murmur. "How can you *bear* to leave such an idyllic place!"

Then Godfrey Mannington would lay his arm, yokelike, about his wife's stolid shoulders and shake his head just sufficiently for one lock of grey-fair hair to fall across his forehead and say,

"How can any artist bear to sell? We create to *share*—to give other people pleasures and—of course—" and here he would smile, deprecatingly, "to be admired."

"But it's your *home!*" they would protest, and he would sigh.

© *1993 by Nell Lamburn.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You know what they say—home is where the heart is—" And the yoke of his arm would press down a little more heavily. "Isn't that so, my dear?"

And obediently, Marjorie Mannington would smile and nod, like a windup doll, her tinkling laugh as ill-fitting to her broad frame as windbells to a carriage clock.

"We're just gypsies at heart! We travel light!" Her lying words conjured caravan and skewbald and lurcher where the white Range Rover was parked. A Mannington cottage did not come cheap, after all.

Why should it? With the cottage stripped and restored, furnished and decorated in a taste that clients were instantly persuaded was their own, the Manningtons would frequently abandon their own furniture as heartlessly as this year's moult. Then they would require only the slimmest of pantechnicons, just the essentials that would see them through the coming months: two beds, a few chairs, a table—mundane essentials. And it would all begin again: the discomfort and toil; the temper and tension; the knowledge that the perfection created would never be theirs.

"Of *course* we'll settle down!" Godfrey Mannington would, in answer to her query, dangle once more the bright reassuring promise, like a fruit that concealed the rottenness of the lie within. "One day."

Then, that night, in the discomfort of whatever solitary room he had assigned her to, she would take out the small rosewood casket, cradle it close against her breast, her expectation raised once more.

"One day!" she'd echo. "One day I'll bring you home! I promise!" And she'd close her eyes and let her lips linger across the burnished surface. Just once or twice a year she might lift the lid, but then pain ran through her like molten fire so that she could barely breathe for it. But she must always look again. To be sure.

And the next morning Godfrey Mannington would note the telltale signs of his wife's emotional disarray as a good stockman notes the well-being of his charges. For Marjorie was his livelihood as much as he was hers. Her skill with needle and fabric and design was as vital to their business as his with restoration, and she must perform—for just as long as he needed.

"We're a team!" He would smile at the Features girls from the London glossies, confidingly, as if sharing a secret. "So *fortunate,* don't you think?" And their commercial superiority would splinter at his practised simplicity. It was only afterwards they discovered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the only suitable photographs contained just one member of that team.

Marjorie Mannington did not mind. With her stout body and heavy face, the camera would never be her friend. Her mother had always made that quite clear. Though her dark eyes, if they had not protruded just a fraction too far, would have been remarkable. As remarkable as the rich chestnut of the thick glossy hair her mother had vociferously refused to let her cut, so that even now, with her mother long dead, she wore it in a chignon so plump and heavy that it seemed to bow her head beneath its weight.

Godfrey Mannington loathed her hair. Sometimes he would wake, sweating, at the memory of their wedding night: the terrible expectancy glowing on her moon face, the thick suffocating dark curtain that had choked his eyes, his mouth, as he'd gone about his business. For business it had been. Passport to his inheritance. To Mannington House.

"Get yourself a son! Get yourself a wife and get yourself a son!" His father's snarl had curled the edges of his voice as viciously as it curled his lip. "Three hundred years we've been here—I'll not let it die with you."

"But it's my *home!*" he'd half screamed: his birthright, his passion from his earliest years, caressed, cossetted, every corner of it beloved, yearned for to own. While other boys might climb trees or strike balls of all shapes and sizes or dream of Grand Prix victories, he'd studied their Dresden and Chelsea, learned the intimate dissimilarities of Beluchi and Kashan, tended the glowing flanks of hautboy and bureau: all to be his one day.

His mother had turned, frightened, away from his frantic gaze, and the brigadier had sneered, venomous:

"She'll not help you, you fool! Not with this. And it's not *your* home—or mine—it's the Manningtons'—dead and unborn. Get yourself a son—or it goes to Gerald!"

Cousin Gerald. Cousin Gerald with his four sons. Smug. Anticipating.

So he'd married Marjorie. With her wide, childbearing hips; her uncomplicated emotional gratitude; her convenient cottage in the Woodford Valley; and her commercial skill with her needle. In thanks for her immediate pregnancy he'd selected, as their furniture expert, the choicest items from the Salisbury auction rooms and, in complement, she had stitched and tucked, quilted and upholstered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A gem. The first Mannington cottage. A cradle for his son. For of course it would be a son.

Francis Godfrey Heyward Mannington lived two days and extracted such a vengeance on his mother for being cheated of his rightful life, that she would never bear another child. The nurses, concerned and kind, packaged up the soft grey ashes and she kept them close by her in the impersonal, pretty room while, in disbelieving grief, she murmured the nursery rhymes she'd learned and whispered of sandcastles and rockpools, flying kites and cricket bats: of a future that was only make-believe, for just the two of them.

Godfrey Mannington did not visit.

"You've had your chance!" his father sneered. "No switching mares—the house is Gerald's!"

Molten, agonised rage had crept through him until, solidifying his emotions to a grey, cold larva of revenge, he could look on his wife again. But only just.

Perhaps she should have left him. When she came home to find the cottage all but sold, perhaps she should have refused her signature, resuscitated her business, and let him go on his own way. But it never occurred to her, and exhausted, empty of child and future, she stayed, clasping about her the illusion of his wedding vows: that their need was mutual. And with that first sale, the Mannington legend was born.

But he did not know about the casket. No one knew about the casket. It was her secret, her treasure. Until she could bring him home.

And now she *was* home. On that early spring afternoon, stout legs awash with daffodils, the wicked, now familiar runnels of pain fluting her thumbs, Marjorie Mannington knew that she had, indeed, come home. Why, she did not understand. Thatched, beamed, walled in flint and brick, it could have been any one of half a dozen cottages they had viewed. Yet instantly she knew that this was where she must live. To remain here—never to move again! Never to stitch another curtain! Her hands wouldn't matter then.

Perhaps it was the setting, for it lay down an unpaved lane, set back from the shallow, silky brown water of the chalk stream, sheltered by still-naked beech and a great white ash. Private. Peaceful. Keeper's Cottage. Only now the water bailiff lived in a smart new bungalow in the village a mile away.

"You like 'n?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marjorie turned, her heart jumping at the boy's unexpected closeness. Only this time, seeing him so near, she saw that he wasn't really a boy. There were faint lines about his black, heavy-lidded eyes, a little looseness beneath his heavy jaw: a slight coarsening of the skin that betrayed more years than she'd thought at their earlier meeting.

"You like 'n?" His long head, sealed with dark hair that tendrilled about his ears, bent just a little in a gesture that was curiously intimate.

Marjorie Mannington looked away quickly, oddly discomforted by his unnoticed approach.

"Yes. Yes, of course. It's—it's delightful!"

" 'Tis Bobbie's." He smiled, confidingly. " 'Tis my 'ome."

"And such a pretty one! So quiet, too." She humoured him. "My husband always insists on peace—he hates noise, you know, loathes it. It quite upsets him—"

As one, they looked back through the window. Godfrey Mannington stood before the fireplace, head bowed, arms straight by his side as a priest stands before an altar to seek divine guidance. Nearby, Mr. Austin, estate agent, waited respectfully, clipboard clasped in commercial reverence.

" 'Tis Bobbie's." The soft voice came again. "I mun stay. Mr. Austin says."

She was startled. "Oh, I think not! Vendors can't lay down conditions like that, you know!" She tried to soften her voice, to make amends for any sharpness, her hand touching his arm. "I know it's difficult to see your home sold, but I *understand!* I've moved mine so *many* times, you see!"

He seemed not to hear her. He was gazing at her hand against his heavy, dark cloth jacket: solid, square-tipped fingers, coarsened from the predations of needle and upholstery. Then, gently, with infinite delicacy, he touched her thumb.

"Poor 'and," he said softly. "Poor sick l'le 'and."

He knew! But he *could* not know! It was just a ridiculous inspired guess! For no one knew: except Dr. Farley, and he was fifteen miles away. Shock stung her, pumping her heart unpleasantly. And no one *must* know. Certainly not Godfrey. Otherwise— The thought of what Godfrey might do sent her ducking through the low doorway into the cottage again to hear Mr. Austin declare, half defiant, half apologetic:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mannington, but there's nowhere else for him to go, you see. Those are the terms of his mother's will."

"Then his mother died crazy!" Godfrey Mannington's voice slid sharply up in bitter frustration, for he knew that the hearth, behind its ugly disguise, was the finest he had ever found. And he wanted it. Lusted for it. "Who in their right mind would take on a condition of sale like that?"

"He's an *excellent* gardener—you've only to look about you! He'll work the river hatches for you, too. And he's *most* handy about the house." Mr. Austin bared his teeth, ingratiatingly. "Not to mention a first-class cook—top marks at the village fete!"

"My wife cooks!" Godfrey Mannington cried angrily. "And does the garden."

*But for how much longer?* The pain shifted sharply from thumb to wrist and lingered now. The boy Bobbie watched through the window, unblinking.

*Bobbie.* With the suddenness of a hare breaking cover, the idea leapt from the troubled thicket of her mind. Bobbie would shield her! With Bobbie here she could manage. Godfrey need not know. Not yet. It would give her time to prepare him, to persuade him that this must be their home. Her heart fluttered in agonised anxiety.

Mr. Austin whined, "It's not often you get a resident handyman for nothing, these days. He could have his own quarter—the little brewhouse would be perfect. Most people would *welcome* the idea!"

"Bullshit." Godfrey Mannington's coarse contempt flushed Mr. Austin's cheeks as red as his tie. "It's a buyer's market. You can't lay down conditions like that. *You* should know that."

She thought Mr. Austin would cry. "I'm only doing my job," he said with a poor attempt at dignity. But Godfrey Mannington had forgotten him. The fireplace dominated him, daring rejection, its perfections taunting him from beneath the plasterboard and disfiguring stone. He trembled, inwardly, as before a veiled mistress. Ah, what pleasure, what satisfaction he would have in restoring it! In revealing this seventeenth-century treasure to the world! *His* triumph! All at once he knew the boy was irrelevant. The boy could be dealt with.

And watching him, as she had watched him for so many years, Marjorie Mannington knew, with trembling exultation, that he would buy.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bobbie was indeed a help. He laboured for their builders who, following them from cottage to cottage, melted away when the structural alterations were done. He cooked and gardened and never intruded. So much so that his retention became Godfrey Mannington's own idea.

"You see how much more time you have for your work! With Bobbie we'll be ready to sell in half the time!" And he knew then, by the panic that trembled his wife's long upper lip, that this time her desire to remain was as fundamental as his had been with Mannington House. It pleased him, therefore, that she should suffer: as he must for the loss of his own inheritance, his home. An eye for an eye. . . .

And Marjorie saw then how terrible a mistake she had made and scrambled up the tightly curled elm-treaded stairs to sit, trembling, on her bed. Pain licked her shoulders and ceased. That's how it would be, Dr. Farley had said. It would come and go until the coming was more than the going, and if she did not face that now and submit to treatment, then the coming would be sooner than later. And that included mucking about with old damp cottages, kneeling in wet gardens, and straining her joints in upholstering, sewing heavy cloth, and clambering up and down ladders. Cottages were no substitutes for children and it was about time she realised it.

Dr. Farley lived in a neo-Georgian house with underfloor heating and double-glazing and not an uneven floorboard in the place. Dr. Farley abhorred the old. It frightened his patients into an agility they didn't know they possessed. But nevertheless, Dr. Farley, grumbling, gave her pills and injections and kept her secret. He was not Godfrey's doctor.

It was, though, only a question of time. Yesterday she had dropped a dish and he'd cried out from the sitting room, angrily, at the sudden noise and Bobbie had called through, his voice soft, placatory.

" 'Tis my fault, sir. 'Tis I dropped it, not Missus. Be angry we' *Bobbie—not* Missus." And winked and grinned, and Marjorie, by her gratitude, betrayed her disability.

"Ah'll bring wax," he whispered. "Wax from Vicar's bees. Wax draws out soreness. 'Twill be our secret."

So, on the occasions Godfrey Mannington was away searching for those genuine effects that were slowly transforming Keeper's Cottage, she sat while he spooned the hot wax over her hands until she was helpless in the hardening fragrant armour. Then Bobbie

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made tea and held the mug to her lips as if she were a child, no matter how she protested.

"Ah done it for Ma," he confided, his long face so close to hers that she could see the rainbow lights in the tiny globule of spittle that lodged permanently in the fleshy angle of his lips. "Ah done everything for her, right t'end. Bobbie knows things, woman's things. Missus mustn't worry. Bobbie's here."

I should be grateful, she thought. Grateful someone cares. But she wasn't. She shrank inwardly from his touch. He wasn't her son. Her son lay upstairs. Waiting to come home. Her son would have been slim and bright, a flame to illuminate their lives. Clean and sweet. Not with the mustiness of old wool and dried sweat that filmed this boy's skin.

Grateful too that he did not mind when Godfrey used him so curtly and thus spared her the sharp impatience that never failed to cut as viciously as the tools he used. Bobbie would only smile and nod and watch Godfrey's deft hands with those brightly dark eyes, his head a little on one side, and move so quietly that Godfrey Mannington sneered.

"He's good, you know. Damn good. Knows just what I'm going to do next—never have to tell him. Worth two of you, d'you know that? We'll be finished in no time at all." And rejoiced in the terror that turned her gaze so quickly from him.

The idea, when it came to her, was so simple that she could not understand how it had evaded her. *Home is where the heart is*. That was what Godfrey always said. Her child's heart. If he were here—permanently—if she laid him to rest at Keeper's Cottage—then surely this would indeed be her home? His presence would somehow permeate his father's soul, bind him to this place too. They would be a true family. He would not know why—oh no, it would be her secret, hers and the child's. Therefore it must be a secret place. A sacred place. Inviolable.

The hearth.

Marjorie Mannington was a patient woman. It seemed that her whole life had been spent waiting: for her mother's approval; a husband; a home; to find a resting place for her son. A month or so more would make little difference. But anticipation pearled up like the first tiny jewels of sweet spring water as she watched the fireplace emerge from its despoilation. The honeyed oak lintel, ancient even when first laid; the comforting swell of the bread oven; the dark rich brick walling with its small deep cupboard; the narrow-bricked floor,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smooth, pale, original. It would, she knew triumphantly, be a fitting tomb. He would be where he should always have been: in the true heart of the house.

On the first Wednesday of each month, Godfrey Mannington drove to Bath. Bills must be paid on time, craftsmen visited and consulted. And if his wife had no need to match and choose material, he would take Bobbie, much as he would take a dog, and leave him with his grandmother at the Home in Chippenham where the old people clucked and cossetted and fed him the cakes their relatives had baked to ease their consciences. He would make his own way back, very late, walking cat-eyed from the late bus along the back road as those old people had in their youth.

Bobbie loved the Range Rover. He would sit up very straight, looking neither to right nor left, only his rigid smile betraying his acute pleasure. Then, when the engine had faded into the dominance of water and wind-brushed leaves, Marjorie Mannington would fetch the casket and carry it from room to half-finished room.

"Our home!" she'd murmur. "This is our home, my darling—we shall never leave—ever! Just you see!"

But not today. Today the hearth was completed. Today she fetched the chisel and hammer and edged the black iron fire basket a little to one side, prised loose, with infinite care, two narrow bricks. She did not feel, with Dr. Farley's pills, the pain in her thumbs or wrists, but worked with a speed and delicacy she had thought gone forever. She hollowed out the earth and laid in the casket. So small, so vulnerable. Never to be seen again. Trembling, she took from her neck the small gold cross her godmother had given her at her confirmation and laid it beside the box.

"There!" she whispered. "There, my darling—rest in peace."

When it was finished, when she had mixed and coloured the cement with the skill of long practice and there was only its damp freshness to show what she had done, the pain overflowed from her heart so that she clasped her wrists and rocked in agony, letting the tears fall unchecked. But she had done right. She would never leave now. *Could* never leave. This would be her guarantee.

*He knew!* Even before the furious engine had died; before the slamming door, the pounding feet—the terrible realisation flash-flooded through her. He *knew*. Somehow, in some unimaginable way, Godfrey knew!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But there was no way that he could—he'd gone to Bath—taken Bobbie to Chippenham. She'd been alone—all day!

*"What have you done?"* Godfrey Mannington wrenched aside the grate and ran his shaking fingers across the bricks. *"What have you done?"* He found the hardening cement. "Ah, desecration! That floor has lain untouched for three centuries and you—you have *despoiled it!"*

He fetched hammer and chisel and she flung herself on him.

"No! No—leave him! Let him rest in peace—ah, *please*!"

But his thrust sprawled her, crumpling her against the wall, and even as she struggled up, he was lifting the casket from its brief tomb.

"No!" Half scream, half moan. "Give him to me!"

"Him?" He prised up the lid, lifting out the little transparent bag. *"Him?"* Understanding whitened his narrow, livid face. "You have carried—*this* for all these years?" Revulsion caused his body to shudder, drew back his lips. "You're sick—sick—"

She lunged, but he was too quick. He was at the door.

"There is only one place for this!"

The compost heap, rich, moist, lay tucked behind the low wattle fence. Marjorie Mannington reached it as the ashes, fragile, ephemerous, drifted free of the bag to settle and dissolve like pale grey snowflakes in the fermenting mass.

On her knees, in awful, hopeless desperation, she clawed and scooped. But they were gone. Consumed as surely and finally as by fire.

In the white ash, a blackbird's fluting song embroidered the early evening, oblivious. A coot scuttered the water abruptly and was silent.

Slowly, very slowly she eased herself upright. He had destroyed their child. Now there was nothing. Nothing left. It seemed as if her blood no longer pulsed but crawled through her, so heavy did she feel.

Godfrey Mannington had returned to the cottage, moving with a quick angry step, and when she followed, numbly, ponderously, she saw him through the open door, on his knees inside the hearth, running his hands over its floor in a silent, absorbed anguish.

She moved close behind him. And then she screamed. She hadn't planned to. She knew that, afterwards. It was as if his destruction of their son had suddenly uncapped the great wellspring of the years past.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sound of his skull against the bricked roof was really very soft, considering the severity of the impact. He twisted and fell across the grate. He was not dead, she knew it: not yet. Little garnet beads of blood bubbled from his ears; a streamlet edged from the corner of his half-hidden mouth. But he would die. Sooner or later he would die. She knew that with equal certainty.

She fetched a chair and, laying her throbbing hands upon her lap, waited. And watched.

No, she didn't want company. No, she wanted to be alone, thank you. Yes, she would eat. As if eating would somehow compensate. As if a meal would gather up those soft grey ashes again. But when they were gone, the policeman and the doctor and the undertaker's men, the realisation that she was now alone crept in on her with the fingers of dusk. And instead of fear, to her astonishment there was only a sweet, enervating relief.

She fetched the strong scissors from the kitchen and loosened her hair, the weight of it pulling at her scalp. Then, laboriously, forcing her fingers through their painful motions, she slowly cut and cut until she stood in a pool of brown silkiness. Then she shook her head and laughed, foolishly, at the lightness of her head.

She was free of Godfrey. Free at last of her mother. And with the selling of Keepers Cottage, she would be free of Bobbie.

She heard him return, very late. Heard the wicket gate click, his step crunch the gravel, his familiar, hawking cough as he unlocked his door. He would not know, he'd pass no houses on the back road. Well, she'd tell him in the morning. Tell him, too, that she would be leaving Keeper's Cottage just as soon as probate was granted. She would move to a nice ground-floor flat in Salisbury and complete the restoration of this, the very last Mannington Cottage, as quickly as she could. There were good doctors in Salisbury, too, a brand-new hospital. And she'd never have to stitch another curtain in her life. Even if she could.

He came to her room the next morning. He stood in the doorway, frowning, holding out the thick locks of hair before him.

"Naughty," he said softly. "Naughty Missus."

She stared at him, suddenly hating him. His subservience, his assumption of his role in the cottage, his secret knowledge of her failing body.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Go away," she said, but he did not move, did not look directly at her.

"Should have called Doctor sooner." He began to stroke the hair. "Poor Mr. Godfrey."

Marjorie Mannington lay very very still. He knew, then. Knew Godfrey was dead. But how did he know?

"Don't be stupid! It was too late—doctors can't bring people back from the dead! Now go! Go away!" An unknown fear slid her voice high. "I don't want you coming in here anymore!"

" 'Tis my 'ome." He looked at her then, a stubborn directness. "Missus needs I."

"Not anymore. I can manage quite well for myself now." Because now she wouldn't need to pretend any longer, it wouldn't matter if her fingers would not obey her. "I'm leaving. I'm selling the cottage, just as soon as it's finished."

Defensively, she closed her eyes against him and when she opened them again, he had gone. Only her hair lay on the old elm boards. And a sick, cold fear in her heart.

He couldn't *know*. Then why say she should have called the doctor sooner? Why had Godfrey gone straight to the hearth—as if someone had told him? How had he known, that first day, about her hands?

She struggled out of bed. Guesswork, that's what it was. Guesswork. The pain stabbed her knees, her ankles, and she sat, panting with the effort, with the awful fear of how Bobbie had known.

Godfrey Mannington was buried at Mannington Church. His mother wept. His father growled,

"Bloody stupid way to go. But he never could get anything right, could he?"

While Cousin Gerald, secure now in his inheritance, merely pressed Marjorie's black-gloved hand as she returned, alone, to the hired car. There wasn't, after all, very much he could say.

Mr. Martin, of Martin, Hendicott, and Akhurst, came the following Thursday, bumping distastefully down the unpaved lane in his glistening black car. Marjorie Mannington watched as Bobbie opened and closed the door and then, with an obsequiousness she found quite repulsive, polished the handle where he had held it. Marjorie did not care for Mr. Martin. He never quite looked at you straight through his steel-rimmed glasses. He knew too much and gave too little away. She liked Mr. Akhurst, but Godfrey had called him a fool. Well, now she could change to Mr. Akhurst.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After Mr. Martin had departed, long after, she sat, quite still, her hands crumpled on her lap. Just staring. She wasn't numb. The shock was too violent for that. It was as if, she thought dully, she'd been beaten almost insensible: every inch of her body ached.

Godfrey had left the cottage to Bobbie.

"He felt, you see," Mr. Martin explained, unable to meet her disbelieving gaze, seemingly not quite convinced himself, "that it was Bobbie's *home*. But of course you would stay here for your lifetime—there's money enough to see you are provided for, so long as you stay *here*, you understand. He was concerned, you see, about your increasing disability. So touched that you tried to spare him the worry of it. He knew this was where you were absolutely determined to spend the rest of your life—and that Bobbie would care for you. No need for a nursing home—no need for strangers. It's all care in the home these days, the government says. Bobbie nursed his mother, Dr. Read told him about that. Wonderfully. Mr. Mannington wanted only the best for you, you must realise that."

The financial side had been Godfrey's. She'd trusted him. Now she had nothing except her widow's pension. All those years of work and she had nothing. Not even her son.

She felt, rather than heard, Bobbie behind her.

"There now, doan fret." His voice was as smooth as a snake's belly. "Bobbie'll take care of thee. Thee an' I—we be *friends*, Missus. Thee and I 'ave secrets, mm?" He touched her shoulder and her breath caught on a sob. "Just doan 'ee scream, Missus. For Bobbie doan like screamers."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# WONDERFUL GIFTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

**THE HOLLYWOOD BIRTHDAY CALENDAR 1994**

Celebrate the birthdays of your favorite stars all year long. The exquisite *Hollywood Birthday Calendar 1994* has 28 pages and features 12 beautiful duotone images of classic stars in their most memorable films. This unique calendar lists the birthdays of over 700 Hollywood legends, 2 on every day of the year. There are even more photos of Hollywood unforgettables and additional birthday trivia inside the calendar. There's also room for *your* important events throughout 1994.

**THE DINOTOPIA AUDIO ADVENTURE**

Dinotopia, the peaceful island where dinosaurs and humans live together, comes to life in a spectacular audio journey. Join Arthur Denison and his son, Will as they transport you to this unique place complete with a full cast of characters, an original score and exceptional sound effects. Inspired by James Gurney's bestselling book, *Dinotopia, The Dinotopia Audio Adventure* has been recreated on two audio cassettes, each with 2 half-hour segments. There's also a "Traveler's Guide to Dinotopia" so you can easily follow along on this wonderful journey!

Please send me: ____ copies of *The Hollywood Birthday Calendar 1994* @ **$10.95** each.
____ copies of *The Dinotopia Audio Adventure* @ **$14.95** each.
Please add $1.50 per item for shipping & handling. NYS residents add 8.25% sales tax.
Please make check or money order payable to **Turner Publishing, Inc.**
Send to: **Turner Publishing, Inc., 420 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018**

014 EL

Name

Address Phone

City State Zip

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

**EDWARD D. HOCH**

*Of all Ed Hoch's characters, Nick Velvet has enjoyed the most success internationally. Collections of stories featuring the eccentric thief have appeared in Japan, and in France, he featured in a television mini-series. With more than sixty cases behind him, Velvet is still going strong, as you'll see in this latest caper . . .*

# THE THEFT OF THE CANCELED STAMP

***by EDWARD D. HOCH***

Sheriff Brad Baxter wasn't used to being roused in the middle of the night. One reason he'd taken the job in Millgate was that not much happened there. It was Middle America at its finest, the sort of town people on either coast would swear no longer existed. Oddly enough, it wasn't located in Kansas or Indiana but in western Pennsylvania. Still, to Sheriff Baxter at least, it was Middle America.

Millgate had only one real industry, the mailing house that employed more than a hundred people from the town and the surrounding area. Bulk mailings, charitable and political solicitations, and magazine fulfillments were all handled out of Millgate Mailing Service. The sprawling building out on Long Ridge Road looked like a busy warehouse with mail trucks constantly coming and going during business hours.

The two A.M. phone call from his deputy that had roused Sheriff Baxter from his slumber took him to this very area, to a roadside field whose location was marked by the flashing red lights of the

*© 1993 by Edward D. Hoch.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deputy's patrol car. "What is it, Foss?" Sheriff Baxter asked, not in the best of spirits.

"Got ourselves a body, Sheriff. Looks like murder."

"Back in the field?"

"Just off the road." Will Foss was a young man, not yet thirty, who seemed to enjoy the night patrols along Millgate's back roads. "I saw taillights pulling away as I approached. Figured it was a couple of lovers I scared off, but I decided to take a look in case they dumped something. I found the body of a man with apparent bullet wounds in the chest."

Murders were rare enough in Millgate to warrant the two A.M. phone call, but Brad Baxter was still irritated by it. "Couldn't you have waited till morning to phone me?" he asked.

"I—I thought you'd want to see him, the body, before the medical examiner got at it."

"Why's that?"

"Take a look at the face. Here's my flashlight."

Baxter walked a few paces into the weeds and snapped on the light. The man's eyes were open, staring at a night sky he'd never see. Across his wide forehead someone had pasted a dozen first-class postage stamps in two rows of six each.

The stamps had been canceled.

"A canceled stamp?" Nick Velvet was repeating at about this same time, in an after-hours bar in New York's Greenwich Village. "You want me to steal a canceled postage stamp?"

The well-dressed man across the table had identified himself as Samuel Quinn. He was tall and about thirty-five, with rugged, tanned features. He held a glass of beer cupped in both hands like a chalice and answered Nick. "That's right. Is it worthless enough to attract your attention?"

"It is, unless it's in some museum collection."

"No, no—it's at a mailing house in Millgate, Pennsylvania. In fact you'll have your choice of any one of ten thousand or more letters with the stamps affixed. They're precanceled to save the post office some work. I'll tell you what batch, later this week. Then you get in somehow and steal one of the letters, or just the stamp if you prefer."

"Why's it so valuable?"

"It's valuable to me, not to anyone else."

"Will you double my fee for two?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Samuel Quinn laughed. "No. I only need one."

"These are ordinary U.S. postage stamps?"

"Correct. First-class denomination, twenty-nine cents."

"Can't you just buy one at the post office?"

Quinn shook his head. "Stop asking questions and start earning your money."

Nick nodded in agreement. "Fair enough. Millgate's somewhere near Pittsburgh, isn't it?"

"An hour's drive. I left my car at the airport there."

"I'll rent one. We should arrive separately."

And so they did, late the following afternoon. Millgate proved to be much as Nick had expected from Samuel Quinn's description on the plane. The main highway into town circled an area of churches and lodge halls, with a park and playground in the middle. There was a library down the street, across from the town's only motel. It was there that Nick parked his rented car and took a room, guessing at a three-night stay.

In the morning while Nick was eating breakfast in what passed for the motel's dining room, Samuel Quinn walked past his table. "Not today," he murmured. "The town's in an uproar. Somebody got killed night before last."

Murders were a rarity in Millgate. In fact there hadn't been a real one in the five years that Brad Baxter had been sheriff. He knew his luck couldn't last forever, yet he was sorry that the victim had been someone employed at Millgate Mailing Service. He was doubly sorry about those damned stamps on the dead man's forehead. It was the sort of detail the city press loved to pick up, with premature speculation on whether the killing might be the work of a deranged postal employee.

The dead man's name was Scott Angelus and he'd been working at the mailing house for about a year. He was a familiar figure in the bars around town and was known as a pretty good pool player who liked to run the balls for five-dollar bets. Unmarried, he'd been linked with various women employees at the place, but apparently had no serious attachments.

"A barroom brawl that got out of hand," Will Foss speculated. Baxter's deputy loved to speculate.

"If he was shot in or near a barroom someone would have heard it."

"His boss from Millgate Mailing is outside. Want to see him?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Who's that?"

"Adam Kelly. Know him?"

"Slightly. Send him in."

Kelly was a husky man in his forties, about Sheriff Baxter's age, who'd lived in the town all his life. He was married with four children, the sort of company man who worked overtime to support his family. He and Baxter were nodding acquaintances, no more than that. "Thank you for coming in," the sheriff told him. "I was planning to question the people who worked with Angelus."

"He was on the four-to-midnight shift when we were busy enough to run a second shift. Otherwise he helped out during the day."

"A good worker?"

"Fair enough. He ran a machine that stuffed envelopes, then sealed and stamped them. The post-office truck comes by twice a day, sometimes more."

"Any special friends or enemies?"

"Not that I know of. He liked to drink and shoot pool, liked the ladies, but didn't have any family ties here."

"Who do you think killed him?"

Adam Kelly shrugged. "The news took the wind out of me. Things like that don't happen in Millgate. You think he was robbed?"

Sheriff Baxter picked up the typed report that he already knew by heart. "He had a hundred and twenty dollars in his pocket."

"That would have been from last week's pay. I guess it wasn't robbery."

"Then there's the matter of the stamps. We've been trying to keep it quiet but the word seems to have gotten out."

"I heard they were stuck to his forehead."

"That's right. Do you mind looking at a photograph of the deceased?"

"No, I guess not."

Baxter slipped the photo out from under his report. "You'll note there are twelve stamps pasted to his forehead. That's three dollars and forty-eight cents at twenty-nine cents each. Does that sum have any significance?"

"My God!" Kelly whispered, staring at the dead face in the photograph. "No," he responded, "I don't think the amount means anything. The killer just wanted to cover his forehead with stamps."

"If we knew the reason, it might give us a lead to the murderer's identity. These are precanceled. They're the sort you use at your company."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We use everything at the mailing house. Usually it's the bulk-mail stamps that are precanceled, but some mailers specify first-class postage. That's especially true if they want a personal look to the envelope. Some people don't even bother to open bulk or pre-sorted letters."

"You agree that these stamps must have come from the mailing house?"

"Well, I suppose so. But Scott might have had them in his pocket. A certain amount of employee theft is inevitable." Adam Kelly examined the picture closely. "The perforations are only on the sides, meaning they're from a coil of stamps. That's the kind we use. The machines automatically affix them to envelopes. They haven't been pulled straight off the coil, though. The bottom strip is all connected, but the top row is made up of three connected stamps, one single, and two more connected."

"What can that mean?"

Kelly shook his head. "Probably just that they were loose in the killer's pocket."

"Tell me something more. You said Scott Angelus had no known enemies. What about a man named Samuel Quinn?"

"Quinn? He used to work for me. Management fired him a couple of months ago. He was Scott Angelus's supervisor."

"Where is he now?"

"Someone told me he moved to Pittsburgh."

"He was here in Millgate last night. For all I know he was here the night before too, when Angelus was killed."

The young woman in the fast-food restaurant across the street from Millgate Mailing Service was wearing faded jeans and a T-shirt with the company's name on it. Nick Velvet arrived with his tray of food just as she was about to sit down in the single remaining booth.

"Suppose we share this," he suggested. "I don't like standing up while I eat."

"Sure," she answered with a shade of reluctance.

"My name is Nicholas," he said, offering his hand. "Jones."

"Ruth Sagas."

"You work across the street?"

"Sure. It's either that or drive into Pittsburgh."

"I hear it's a pretty good place."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She picked up her hamburger and took a bite. She was a small, attractive woman still in her twenties, apparently unmarried, since she wore no ring. "It's easy work and not too boring. I run a mailing machine."

"I guess you mail out things like magazines."

"Some of the girls do, but I just handle letters. Sometimes there's printing involved too. And enclosures. The magazines are easy, in from the printer one day, out in the mail the next. It's called fulfillment. Is my job ever fulfilling!"

"I thought you didn't do magazines."

She took another bite. "That was just a joke, but how come you're so interested? You one of those reporters from Pittsburgh come up here because of the murder?"

"I'm just interested in your job," he answered noncommittally. "I see that place over there and I wonder what goes on inside. Does your machine automatically stamp the envelopes too?"

"You bet! We have these huge rolls of twenty-nine-cent stamps, except the post office calls them coils. Can you believe that each coil holds ten thousand stamps? They're almost two feet across!" She thought a moment and corrected herself. "Well, maybe not quite that large but they're big! They cost two thousand nine hundred dollars each."

"Are they precanceled?"

"For two thousand nine hundred dollars a crack the post office will furnish them any way you want."

"I know a few people over there," Nick told her. "Who do you work for?"

"Adam Kelly is in charge of mailings. That's where Scott Angelus worked too—the fellow that got killed."

Nick had heard about the killing several times since his arrival. He could see no connection with his assignment but he pretended interest simply because everyone else in town was interested. "Did you know Angelus?"

"A little." She lowered her eyes and blushed a bit. "He asked me out once but I didn't go."

"Did he have lots of girls?"

"Some, I guess. I didn't know him very well." She finished the hamburger and drank some of her Coke. "You are a reporter, aren't you?"

"No! Honest!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She smiled. "My name is Ruth Sagas, remember. Be sure to get it right."

"Really, I'm not a reporter," Nick insisted. As she picked up her tray and started to leave, he added, "Are you going back to work now?"

"I have to pick up some printing first."

"I'll walk with you if that's all right."

She shrugged. "Suit yourself. What'd you say your name was?"

"Nicholas. Nicholas Jones."

They left the restaurant and headed down the block toward a building shared by a printer and a pizza parlor. "They call you Nick?"

"A few people do."

"Here's the printer. Some of our clients use him so we can pick up the jobs and mail them right out. Saves time. They fax the material directly to him and we do the rest."

The printer was a balding man named Pete Jenson. His front counter was piled with orders waiting to be picked up, and Nick could see an employee running a high-speed lithograph in the back room. "Here's your order, Miss Sagas," he said immediately, pushing forward two boxes of form letters. "One thousand copies."

"Thanks, Mr. Jenson. I gave you the purchase order, didn't I?"

"Right here."

Nick glanced around at the samples of Jenson's work, everything from full-color calendars to checkbooks for a local bank. Having visited the restaurant and the printer, he wondered how many other small businesses had sprung up around the mailing house.

Suddenly he realized that Ruth Sagas was saying goodbye to him as well as to Jenson. "I enjoyed meeting you, Mr. Jones. Bye-bye."

"Goodbye," he said, unable to find an excuse to continue their conversation. He watched through the print-shop window as she walked quickly across the busy highway and entered the Millgate Mailing building. To judge by the other employees returning to work after the lunch hour, most of them were women.

He thought about how to steal the stamp that Quinn needed, as soon as he got the word.

Sheriff Baxter had spent the day talking with a good many people who'd known the murdered man. His deputy Will Foss had called at every bar and pool hall within an hour's drive of Millgate. Scott Angelus had frequented several of them, but no one remembered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seeing him on the night he was killed. The most interesting fact he'd learned was that Samuel Quinn was back in town, and he had his deputy keeping an eye out for him.

Will Foss reported back that afternoon. "Wasn't hard to find Quinn. He's staying with his ex-wife over on Mill Pond."

The news startled Baxter. A bachelor himself, he'd dated Francie Quinn a few times. "Hope she's not taking him back. That would be a big mistake."

Will Foss shrugged. "She knows him better than anyone. Chances are she's just giving him a room for a night or two."

Baxter grunted. Maybe he'd take a ride out there and have a talk with Samuel Quinn. He and Francie had been divorced for two years. It was time he stopped coming around.

But Quinn wasn't at Francie's house. She answered the door in her robe, even though it was early afternoon, and asked, "Is this business or a social call?"

"I'm afraid it's business, Francie. I'm looking for Samuel. I understand he's been staying with you."

"He was here last night. His overnight bag is still here, so I assume he'll be back."

"I didn't know you two were still friendly."

Francie Quinn brushed back her stringy brown hair. "I was married to him for six years. He wanted a place to stay, so I gave him one. What's wrong with that?"

"Did he say what brought him back to Millgate?"

"No. He didn't say what made him leave, either."

"What about Monday night? Was he in town Monday?"

Her eyes widened a bit and he could almost see a light click on in her head. "You think he's connected with the Angelus killing!"

"I'm just investigating the case, Francie. Samuel knew him and there was bad blood between them. I have to check it out."

"Well, he didn't get in till Tuesday afternoon. He flew into Pittsburgh and picked up his car at the airport. He's been living in Pittsburgh the last couple of months."

"He must have come back here for something. He could drive over in an hour if he just wanted to see somebody."

"I don't know. He mentioned some business he had to take care of." She tightened her robe, beginning to seem uneasy.

"He was never happy about losing his job at the mailing house."

"Can't blame him for that. They gave him a raw deal." She shifted her stance in the doorway and added, "Look, Brad, I have an appoint-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment in an hour. I have to finish getting ready. If there are no more questions—"

He saw the sudden look of recognition in her eyes and turned toward the car that had just pulled up in front of the house. Baxter knew it was Samuel Quinn even before the tall rugged man slipped out from behind the wheel. "Thanks, Francie," Baxter said, leaving her at the door.

If Quinn was trying to avoid him he gave no sign of it. "Sheriff Baxter—haven't seen you around in quite a while."

"That's because you've been away," Baxter said, intercepting him as he came around his car. "I have a few questions to ask. It shouldn't take long."

Samuel Quinn frowned. "Questions about what?"

"The murder of Scott Angelus."

"Yeah, I heard about that. Damn shame."

"Let's go sit in my car."

"I'm pretty busy right now."

"It's either my car or down at my office. Take your pick."

Quinn shrugged and accompanied Baxter to his car. "I was in New York on Monday night, you know. I wasn't even here till yesterday."

"You got anyone who can prove that?"

"Well, yes. A fellow who's in Millgate right now. He'll vouch for me. We were together in a Greenwich Village bar after midnight Monday."

"What's this man's name?" Baxter asked, taking out his notebook and pen.

"Nick—Nicholas. It's Nicholas Jones. He's in town doing some research work on Millgate Mailing."

"What sort of research work?"

"I think he's interested in the mailing business. I told him what I could about it."

Baxter made a few notes. "Now tell me about you and Angelus."

"There's nothing much to tell. I was his supervisor at Millgate Mailing. We didn't get along too well and I gave him a couple of negative performance reports. Sometimes he'd go out shooting pool on his lunch hour and if his luck was running good he'd be an hour or two late getting back."

"He'd gamble on pool?"

"He sure would! That's where you should be looking for his killer, among his pool buddies."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right," the sheriff decided. "I'll be at my office the rest of the afternoon. You bring this Nicholas Jones in to make a statement. Francie says you flew in Tuesday. Bring me some evidence of that. If it all checks out, you're off the hook."

"Thanks, Sheriff."

Nick Velvet spent the remainder of the afternoon in the block of shops directly across the street from Millgate Mailing. Pete Jenson's print shop shared a one-story building with Perfect Pizzas, and he wasn't surprised to see delivery boys emerge from time to time carrying the big square pizza boxes across the street to the mailing house, especially after the day shift left at four o'clock and it was obvious others were working on into the evening. He especially noted how the delivery boys walked by the uniformed security guards without a second glance. He wondered if there was any chance he could pass for one of them. Probably not, he told himself realistically. Thirty years ago, maybe.

He'd just about decided there was no more to be learned there when Samuel Quinn pulled into the parking space in front of the pizza shop. "Get in, Nick," he said. "We have to talk."

"When is it, tonight?"

"I don't know yet. Something else has come up. You have to supply me with an alibi."

"For what?"

"The sheriff here thinks I shot and killed a man Monday night, sometime after midnight. I told him I was in New York and have a witness to prove it. He wants to see you now, this afternoon."

Nick didn't like the sound of it. "I'm supposed to call on the sheriff, let him get to know me, and then try to pull off a robbery for you?"

"I have no choice, Nick. I had some run-ins with this Angelus before I left Millgate Mailing. Now he's murdered and I'm back in town. I need you for my alibi."

"All right," Nick reluctantly agreed. He was wondering if this whole business, from start to finish, might have been an elaborate plot to furnish Quinn with an alibi. But for the life of him he couldn't figure out how the man could have been with him in New York and killing someone in Millgate at the same time.

Sheriff Baxter was in his office when they arrived. Nick's first impression was of an authoritative figure with graying hair and a no-nonsense manner. He sat down across the cluttered desk from him and told his story. Quinn had been with him in New York at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

virtually the same time Scott Angelus's body was being discovered by Deputy Foss in Millgate on Monday night.

Sheriff Baxter eyed Nick in silence for a moment, then asked, "Did you know the victim?"

"No. To my knowledge I never laid eyes on him."

The sheriff passed a picture across the desk. "This is Angelus as we found him."

The canceled stamps across the dead man's forehead both shocked and fascinated Nick. It seemed highly likely that they were connected in some way with the stamp he'd been hired to steal. Had Angelus tried the same thing and ended up dead?

"I don't know him," Nick insisted. "I've never been to Millgate before."

"What brought you here this week?"

"I'm thinking of making some investments in this area. I wanted to look it over first, get the feel of it. Mr. Quinn has been helpful in acquainting me with the background." He picked up the harsh black-and-white photograph of the dead man and studied it again. There was something about it— "I wonder if you removed these stamps from his forehead."

"The best we could. They're a bit damaged but we have them in an evidence envelope."

"Could I see them?"

The sheriff stared at Nick as if considering a proper reply to the request. Finally he reached into one of the folders on his desk and took out a clear plastic envelope. "Don't open it. You can look at them through the plastic."

"Do you have a magnifying glass?"

"A what?"

"Magnifying glass," Nick repeated with a smile. "You know, like Sherlock Holmes."

Sheriff Baxter shot him an icy glance and rummaged around in his desk drawer, finally coming up with one. "All right, wise guy, what do you see?"

Nick inspected the torn stamps that had been peeled from the victim's forehead. As in the photograph, one strip of six canceled stamps was complete. The others were a trio, a pair, and a single stamp. The red stripes in the American flag were a tiny bit lighter on the single stamp, as if it might have come from a different roll. Nick looked up to answer Baxter's question. "Nothing you didn't see, I'm sure."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sheriff Baxter returned the stamps to his folder and the glass to his cluttered drawer. "Any suggestions why they should have been stuck to his forehead?"

"Not right now," Nick admitted. "A warning, perhaps? Maybe they have a special meaning in the underworld, like paying to ship the body to Hades or wherever."

"I never heard that one," Baxter said. He turned his attention to Quinn. "What about it? Any ideas?"

"Not a one," Quinn answered.

"You worked with the man."

"We weren't friendly."

"I know that already. But you both worked in the same department, for the same boss."

Samuel Quinn nodded. "That's right—Adam Kelly."

"Were you both fired by Kelly?"

"I can't speak for Angelus. He was still there when I left."

"But you'd given him some bad performance reports."

"We went over that already. Our troubles were in the past."

"All right," the sheriff said with a sigh. "You can both go now, but I may want to talk with you again."

Nick was happy to be out of there. He had visions of being locked up in a little county jail. On the way back to the car he asked Quinn, "Are you certain you're telling me everything?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why did you hire me? Is there a real reason why a canceled stamp is that valuable to you, or did you just want an alibi while an accomplice was killing Angelus?"

"What accomplice?"

Nick Velvet shrugged. "Maybe your ex-wife."

Samuel Quinn gave a snort. "Francie wouldn't hurt a fly. If she was my accomplice I'd hardly draw attention to her by staying at her house, would I?"

"Do you still want me to steal the stamp?"

"Of course!"

"When?"

"I'm waiting for word. I was hoping for this evening, but now it looks more like tomorrow."

"All right," Nick agreed. "In the meantime I'll try to stay away from Sheriff Baxter."

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sheriff had other ideas about that. As soon as Jones and Quinn left his office he decided they needed to be followed. He told Will Foss to stick with Quinn and decided to take on Nicholas Jones himself. It wasn't a close tail, but he managed to keep the man's rented car in sight at the diner where Jones ate and later at the pool hall out by the mailing house where he pulled in and parked. When he entered the place and didn't emerge in thirty minutes, Baxter decided to see what was going on. He was a regular there himself, so his visit wouldn't seem unusual.

Baxter said hello to a few of the regulars and then joined Adam Kelly at the bar. He glanced over at the pool tables but didn't see Jones at first. "How's it going, Adam?"

"Can't complain, Sheriff. Keeping busy?"

"The Angelus killing has me mighty busy."

"No leads yet?"

"None to speak of."

"When I was at your office, you told me Samuel Quinn was back in town."

"That's right. According to his alibi, though, he was in New York City at the time of the murder." That was when the sheriff spotted Nicholas Jones walking toward him from the direction of the men's room. When he kept coming, Baxter moved off the stool.

"Sorry, Sheriff, you seem to have my place."

Baxter grunted. "Didn't know it was occupied. Are you two friends?"

Nicholas Jones slid onto the barstool, displacing the sheriff. "We were just chatting about the mailing house," Adam Kelly volunteered. "Mr. Jones sells security systems. He was wondering about the system at Millgate Mailing."

Baxter turned a fresh eye toward Jones. "You didn't tell me you sold security systems."

"I guess the subject never came up." He signaled the bartender for another drink. "I was just curious, with all the guards around."

"There's a lot of valuable things get mailed out," Kelly said. "Just the stamps are valuable if you get enough of them. Management doesn't like employees walking off with things in their pockets."

"It's a good warning to thieves," Baxter said pointedly, directing his words to Jones.

It was evening and the pool hall was beginning to fill up. Baxter spotted Pete Jenson from the print shop with one of the mailing-house girls. Nicholas Jones saw them, too, and greeted the young

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman with, "Hello, Ruth. Good to see you again." Baxter remembered that her name was Ruth Sagas. He wondered how Jones knew her.

There was lots of talk going back and forth, and Baxter had a hard time following it all. Ruth was kidding with Adam Kelly about sending out for a pizza the following evening when their shift would be working late. She'd had a few drinks already and she seemed to find the entire subject hilarious. Baxter decided maybe they weren't talking about pizzas at all. Maybe they were talking about sex.

For Nick Velvet it had been an unpleasant shock to walk out of the men's room and find his barstool occupied by the broad backside of Sheriff Baxter. He tried to make the best of it, but his conversation with Adam Kelly about security at the mailing house was fatally compromised. He'd get his instructions from Quinn and go in after that postage stamp and the sheriff would be waiting just inside the door with a drawn gun.

Then Ruth Sagas arrived, the girl he'd chatted with at the fast-food place. She was with the printer, Jenson, and that surprised Nick. He listened to the banter about pizzas and suddenly thought of something to ask Baxter. "Sheriff, was Scott Angelus killed instantly?"

"Sure was. Took a bullet right through the heart, or so close it didn't make any difference. The autopsy report said he couldn't have lived for more than a minute or two."

Nick took his beer and drifted over to Ruth Sagas. "How you doing?" she asked.

"Can't complain. No work tonight?"

"Night off. Tomorrow we'll be at it till midnight."

Nick stayed around awhile longer, until he decided Baxter had lost interest in following him. He headed back to his motel, turned on the light in his room, closed the drapes, and went back into the hall, exiting the building through the rear fire door. He couldn't trust the phone, so he drove through the town's back streets to the home of Quinn's ex-wife where he knew his client was staying.

Francie Quinn proved to be a tall woman in her thirties with stringy brown hair. She was no beauty but she managed to project an aura of sexuality. When he asked for Samuel Quinn she replied, "He's my ex. He doesn't live here anymore."

"Tell him Nick was looking for him."

She studied him, chewing on her lower lip. "I told you he—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quinn came into view behind her. "What's up, Nick? I hope you weren't followed."

"Baxter is down at the pool hall, throwing back a few beers. The whole crowd is there. Things are getting a bit too chummy for me."

"What do you mean? Are you making friends?"

"Sure," Nick told him. "People to come visit me when I'm in jail. I need to get this job wrapped up. When can I move?"

Quinn shot a warning glance at his ex-wife. "Francie, we'll be up in the spare bedroom for a few minutes."

"Better leave the door open," she said with a snort.

When they were alone Quinn told him, "It's tomorrow night. I just got the call. Any time after seven. Here's exactly what I want—one precanceled stamp from a roll of ten thousand that'll be on Ruth Sagas's mailing machine. Have you met her?"

"I have."

"Getting in and out of the plant will be your job. There are security guards to check ID and inspect packages at all entrances. It won't be easy, but that's what you're being paid for."

"It's Sagas who's been tipping you off, isn't it?"

"Let's just say she's an old friend."

"What's this all about?"

Quinn took out a cigarette and lit it. "I guess it's about getting even. You read about these guys who win the lottery and buy the company they work for? I didn't win the lottery but I had a few good days at the off-track betting parlor in New York. I figured the thing I'd like most to do with twenty-five grand is to get back at the guy who fired me."

"Adam Kelly."

"Adam Kelly."

"You could have him killed for that much money."

"God, Nick—I'm not a murderer!"

"How—?"

"No more questions. Just do it tomorrow night."

He stubbed out his cigarette and they went back downstairs. Francie Quinn said goodbye to Nick as he left.

On Thursday morning Sheriff Baxter sat in his office feeling hung over. He was already sorry he'd got drinking with that mailing-house crowd and allowed Nicholas Jones to slip away. He was sure Jones was up to no good, and felt strongly that whatever happened would happen that day. The desk clerk at the motel had told him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jones booked the room for three nights, and this was the third night coming up.

He called Will Foss into the office and ran over his theory. "I think this Jones might be a New York hit man that Quinn hired. Suppose they arrived before midnight Monday and Jones killed Scott Angelus, sticking the stamps on his forehead to connect the murder to the mailing house. Now they're waiting to kill Adam Kelly, the man who got Quinn fired."

Will Foss was frowning. "Hit men usually don't hang around after a job, Sheriff."

"Maybe this Jones is different. I want you to stick with me today, just in case. I'll alert the security guards at the mailing house that Jones might try to slip in. And we'll personally keep an eye on him."

"Even if you're right, he's not going to kill Kelly at work, in front of a dozen witnesses."

"I'm just not taking any chances, Will. Whatever he's planning, today's the day."

Nick was aware all day Thursday that the sheriff was tailing him. That pretty much precluded any attempt to get into Millgate Mailing. Slipping past the guards would have been difficult under the best of circumstances, even with the diversionary tactics he'd planned. Now he had to come up with something else.

He thought about it all afternoon, and by evening he knew what had to be done. If he was right, it would be the easiest robbery he'd ever pulled off.

At 6:45 that evening he walked into the pizza parlor adjoining Jenson's print shop and ordered a large pepperoni pizza to go. He waited while they made it, then killed a few more minutes chatting with the clerk about the warm spring weather. Just before seven o'clock another large pizza emerged from the back room.

"This one is for the mailing house," the cook said. "Adam Kelly's shift is working late tonight. Have someone run it over."

The pizza was quickly boxed and the lid taped down. A young man who couldn't have been much out of high school picked it up and started out the door. Nick picked up his pizza and followed along. Once outside, as they were crossing the highway toward the mailing house, Nick reached in his pocket and pulled out a twenty-dollar bill.

"Kid, I want to play a joke on Adam Kelly. Here's twenty bucks if you'll trade boxes with me. I want him to get the pepperoni."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well . . . " He was staring at the twenty. "I don't know—"

Nick added a second twenty as they reached the far curb. The kid handed over the pizza and accepted Nick's box in return.

Samuel Quinn was waiting in his car around the corner on a side street. "Here it is," Nick said, opening the door and dropping the pizza box on the front seat.

"Here what is? Have you got the stamp?"

"Let me cut you a slice of pizza," Nick said with a smile. He opened the box and used a pocket knife to slice through the topping. Almost at once the blade encountered a plastic-wrapped package, round and flat.

"What's that?" Quinn asked. He seemed genuinely surprised.

"A coil of ten thousand first-class postage stamps, precanceled. You can have whichever one you want."

"I thought you didn't steal anything of value, Nick."

"I don't. As you well know, these stamps are counterfeit."

Busily brushing the pizza topping from the plastic-wrapped stamps, they never heard the approach of the other man until he shoved a pistol through the open window only inches from Nick's head. "Hand it over or you're dead!" he demanded. It was the printer, Pete Jenson.

Then there were two deafening shots and a searing pain that plunged Nick into darkness.

Sheriff Baxter wrestled the wounded man to the ground and handcuffed his good arm. "Get on the radio, Foss, and call for an ambulance. I'll read Mr. Jenson his rights."

"What about Jones?" the deputy asked, seeing the bloodied figure in the car. "Is he dead?"

"Jenson's bullet just grazed his temple," Quinn said. "He's regaining consciousness now."

Baxter turned the handcuffed man over to his deputy and walked over to the car. "How are you feeling, Mr. Jones, or Nicholas, or whatever your name is?"

"Nick will do fine." He was wiping the blood away with a handkerchief. "What happened?"

"I was following you and I saw you fooling around with pizzas. Jenson saw you, too, from the window of his print shop. The damn fool came running out with his pistol only barely concealed. He came around this corner after you and I thought he was going to shoot you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He was," Nick said, still holding his head.

"I hit him in the arm just as he fired, maybe saved you from something worse."

"Like being dead. Thanks, Sheriff."

"Now you owe me some explanations. What are those stamps doing inside the pizza?"

"It's a long story. I'm a friend of Quinn here. He suspected there was dirty work with the mailing house stamps from time to time."

"I suspected too much," Quinn agreed. "That's why I was fired. Pete Jenson was counterfeiting stamps and sneaking them into the mailing house where Adam Kelly used them for occasional mailings."

Sheriff Baxter shook his head. "Who'd bother to counterfeit something like a postage stamp?"

"No one, for just a few letters. Even sheets of a hundred probably wouldn't be worth it. But when you're talking coils of ten thousand stamps at a time it's a different matter. Unscrupulous mass mailers are perfectly willing to use them, and they only have to be good enough to pass through an automated mail system without being noticed."

The ambulance had arrived by that time and Jenson was taken away to have his arm treated. Nick was treated on the scene and declined a hospital trip. "I'm all right," he insisted. "I've got a head of iron."

"How'd you know about the counterfeit stamps?" the sheriff asked.

"Scott Angelus told me."

"The dead man? How in hell—"

Nick managed a weak smile. "It was the stamps on his forehead. The single one in the top row was a shade lighter than the others. Examining it through your magnifying glass, I guessed it was a phony, without the sharp engraved lines of the real thing. I think Angelus had it on him when he was shot. You said he couldn't have lived more than a minute or two, Sheriff, but that can be long enough for a dying man. A postage stamp in his pocket would have meant nothing to investigators, so he tried to leave you a dying message. With his final breath he stuck the counterfeit stamp to his own forehead."

"I'll be damned," Sheriff Baxter said softly.

"Naturally it would have been carefully examined and revealed to be a fake, and that's what he wanted. I think Pete Jenson didn't discover the stamp on his forehead until he was dumping the body

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the roadside. Then he saw it. What should he do? Trying to peel it off would leave traces and there was no water handy to wash away the residue. Yet somehow he had to distract attention from that one stamp. He did it in a manner Chesterton's Father Brown might have appreciated. He hid it by surrounding it with eleven real stamps he had in the car or on his person. Perhaps they were ones he'd copied to make his counterfeits. If you noticed the difference you thought nothing of it."

"I follow you that far, but why did it have to be Jenson?"

"A counterfeiter implies someone with printing equipment. Jenson was the logical suspect. The samples in his showroom included checkbooks for local banks. That told me two things—he could do high-quality designs and he had equipment to do perforations necessary for both stamps and checkbooks. The usual circular holes can be punched on a sewing machine, but for these high quantities the counterfeiter would have needed something far faster and more professional."

Sheriff Baxter still wasn't quite satisfied. "I thought Kelly was the one Angelus disliked. If Kelly was involved in the counterfeit plot too, doesn't it make more sense that Kelly would kill to keep him quiet?"

"The clue of the stamp had no direct tie to Kelly though. It might have meant anyone at Millgate Mailing. It had to point the other way, toward the printer of the counterfeit, who had more to lose anyway if Angelus went to the police. Check that gun Jenson used on me, check the trunk of his car for bloodstains. I think you'll find enough evidence to convict him."

Baxter scratched his head. "Are you some sort of detective?"

"No, nothing like that." Nick lifted the pizza box from the seat of Quinn's car. "Here, don't forget your evidence."

"Ten thousand stamps?"

"Less one," Nick told him. "I took it for a souvenir."

When they were alone Samuel Quinn accepted the postage stamp and paid over the money to Nick. "I don't need it now, but a deal's a deal."

"I'll accept it, with thanks. It'll pay for this graze across my scalp."

"I followed everything you told Baxter, but how'd you know the stamps were in the pizza?"

Nick Velvet smiled, though his head was still throbbing. "With the tight security at the place, I knew none of the workers was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

carrying a big roll of counterfeit stamps inside. I noticed earlier that the pizza deliveries went through without any trouble, and I got to thinking that a roll of ten thousand stamps would fit nicely inside a large pizza. Jenson's print shop was in the same building as the pizza parlor, and tonight I saw them bring that pizza out of the back room rather than baking it in the regular oven. I was already suspicious because you told me the stamps would be there after seven and I'd heard Kelly and Ruth joking about ordering a pizza at seven."

Samuel Quinn nodded. "Kelly got me fired, and I knew the best way to get back at him would be through this counterfeit stamp scheme. Management knew nothing about it, and if I could get a stamp to show them, it would get Kelly fired or even arrested. Ruth wouldn't steal one for me, but she told me when they'd be using them. When I won that money gambling in New York I decided to hire you to do the rest. I had no idea Angelus was trying his own blackmail scheme on Pete Jenson."

"Kelly used cheap counterfeit stamps that Jenson printed and billed the customer for the full amount of the postage?"

"Exactly. The post office never noticed anything, especially when we were using precanceled stamps that didn't get close inspection."

Nick walked back toward his own car. "I'd like to be out of here before Baxter decides he needs me to testify at the trial. What about you?"

Quinn seemed to give it some thought. "Maybe I'll hang around," he answered. "Millgate was a nice place to live once, when I was married to Francie. Maybe it can be again."

CUSTOMER SERVICE
OR SUBSCRIBER ASSISTANCE

Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to: Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 5127, Harlan, IA 51593-5127.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

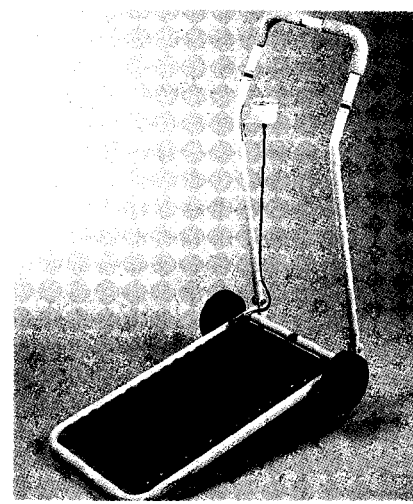
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

## ▼ CUTLERY: A CUT ABOVE THE REST

The secret behind Regent Scheffield's new Laser 2000's cutlery is the unique machined edge guaranteed to stay super sharp for 25 years — without sharpening! The result is a knife so sharp and durable that it comes with an unmatched guarantee: If a Laser 2000 knife ever dulls, chips, rusts, or breaks during the next 25 years, Regent Sheffield will replace it FREE! Plus, the Laser 2000's blades have a unique nonstick Xylan coating, so slicing even hard vegetables is a snap. And clean-up is a cinch because food doesn't stick to the blades. Unbreakable, dishwasher-safe handles are contoured to fit your hand comfortably. A lovely sleek wood block holds the entire 5 piece set: bread knife, carving knife, cook's knife, utility knife, and paring knife. **$129.98** ($7.00) #A1933.

## ▼ FOLDAWAY EXERTRACK™

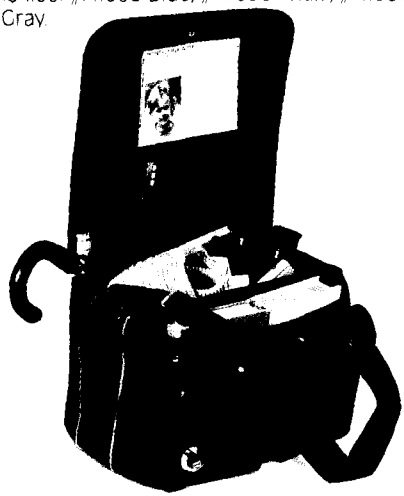


Staying in shape is vital for our health and well being with today's lifestyle. Getting to the gym may not always be easy in our busy lives. We have just the answer for all you people on the go or just for the ones who enjoy to get fit at home. That's why the Foldaway Exertrack is the perfect way to exercise. This personal treadmill has a speedometer/odometer to monitor speed and progress. It measures 38"x21"x3" and features a safe rubber track and an adjustable handlebar that faces forward or backward for running and walking comfort. No electrical connections or motors needed. Exercise has never been simpler. Order one today and get on the right track with the Exertrack. Folds away for easy storage, lightweight and compact. At a great price! **$131.98** ($15.00) #A1977.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## ▼ EVERYTHING BAG

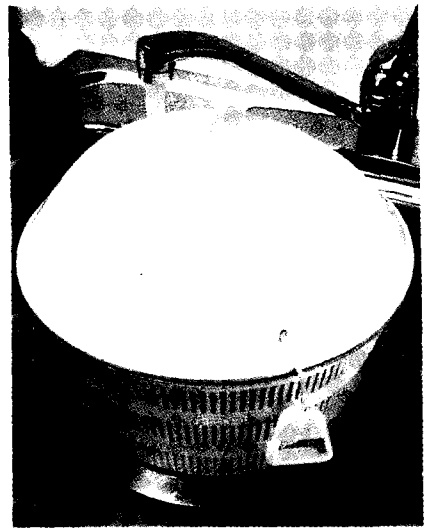
People on the go always have so much to carry around. The Everything Bag makes it a snap. This oversized shoulder bag is constructed of tough, water-resistant canvas material and features nine roomy pockets. Plus, an unusual zipper design enables the bag to expand to double its normal width—to a full eight inches. Adjustable 2" wide straps provides a real comfort feature. In 3 great colors. **$24.98** ($4.00) #A1955-Blue; #A1956-Khaki; #A1957-Gray.



## ▼ FOOD FOR WOOD

Most of the convenience waxes you buy actually dry out wood instead of nourishing it. What's the alternative? Our choice is Williamsville Wax. It is made of beeswax and lemon oil, heat-blended with other natural oils. It can be used on any type of wood, any type of finish, on paneling or kitchen cabinets as well as fine furniture. Williamsville Wax is super for restoring neglected or mistreated wood. Two 8-oz. bottles cost **$13.98** ($3.25) #A14312.

## ▼ SPIN WASH, SPIN DRY



The Jet Spin Washer/Dryer for salad greens and vegetables does a better job with less effort than any other method of preparation. As the stream of water hits the spinning inner basket, it bursts into spray, giving the contents a good drenching before being carried off by centrifugal action. Flywheel action keeps basket spinning with only a few gentle tugs. Spray wash coaxes dirt and grit from innermost lettuce wrinkles. Turn off the faucet and with a few more tugs the remaining water spins away, leaving you with crisp clean salad greens, so dry they are positively perky. Also works for fruits and vegetables. The Jet Salad Washer/Dryer is self-draining, splashfree. **$19.98** ($4.50) #A1520.

---

**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 014EL, PO. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc 1990
1905 Swarthmore Ave, Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

**DONALD OLSON**

*From his snowy home in upstate New York, Donald Olson has produced another of his cleverly ironic tales. "The one good thing about winters up here," he says, "is that they provide few distractions from writing . . ."*

# ONE LIFE TOO MANY

***by DONALD OLSON***

Until the morning Evelyn West rapped at his door in a panic, Larry had caught only passing glimpses of his new neighbor across the hall in Parkview Estates. Did he know how to shut off her smoke alarm? Something had gone amiss with her oven; a smell of burnt pastry filled the apartment. While Mrs. West slid open the windows, Larry reached up and wrenched off the alarm's cover, silencing its urgent squeal.

Gratefully, Mrs. West offered him coffee as they sat waiting for the air to clear. "I'm a total dunce about mechanical things," she confessed. "But then I never had to worry about them. Albert was always handy."

"Albert?"

"My late husband." A saintly smile paid tribute to the departed one's memory and displayed what seemed to Larry too many teeth in so small a face; she was older than he'd thought, but impeccably groomed for so early in the morning. "I'm a widow," she added. "Ugly word, widow. One thinks of weeds and weeping willows in the rain."

Larry's admiring glance found nothing weedy or weepy about this sprightly widow. "And widower? What does that make one think of?"

*© 1993 by Donald Olson.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her startled look exaggerated the prominence of her pale blue eyes. "You don't mean that you're . . . but you're so young!"

"I lost my wife a year ago."

"How extraordinary that we should be neighbors."

Hardly extraordinary, thought Larry, most of the residents of Parkview Estates seeming to be wealthy widows, widowers, and retired couples. Eyes still watering from the smoke, he pulled off his glasses and looked around the apartment approvingly. Evelyn West possessed not only taste but clearly the means to indulge it. And fresh flowers in abundance, to Larry the ultimate touch of class. Before leaving he invited Mrs. West over for a drink the following afternoon.

"Only if you promise to play me Cole Porter," she replied. "All I've heard through my door is a tantalizing tinkle."

Fresh from the hairdresser and wearing an expensively simple frock, Evelyn West looked attractively younger as Larry greeted her the next day. Her faint air of wariness vanished as she admired the splendors: pictures, silver, really fine antique furniture. Larry led her across the living room to a Sheraton settee.

"I'd like you to meet Simone," he murmured.

Simone reclined, the picture of pampered indolence, upon a satin pillow embroidered with tiny pink rosebuds, her cerulean blue eyes widening to acknowledge the intruder with cautious uncertainty.

Mrs. West disguised her revulsion. She loathed cats, even so exquisite a creature as this chocolate and fawn Siamese. "Oh, pretty, pretty," she twittered, about to extend a nervously appreciative hand when Larry uttered a swift warning. "I shouldn't touch her if I were you. She can be rather—temperamental."

Mrs. West took a seat beside the pink marble fireplace. "I wouldn't have pictured you as a cat fancier, Mr. Roemer."

"Larry, please. Simone is special. Like family. She belonged to Nadia, you see. My wife."

Mrs. West glanced again at the silver-framed photograph atop the baby grand, having at first assumed it to be a picture of Larry's mother. "You miss her terribly, I'm sure. Same with me. Seriously, I didn't want to go on living after I lost Albert."

"Perhaps you'll marry again. You're still young."

"How gallant. But a woman in my position must be so frightfully careful. When one is beyond the rosy bloom of youth and has anything at all set aside, it's hard to know if a man is keen on oneself or, well, you know what I mean."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Presently, Mrs. West reminded Larry of his promise to play for her.

"I fear I may have deceived you," he admitted shyly, rising to select a cassette from a cabinet behind the piano and inserting it in a stereo unit. As a Chopin prelude floated dreamily upon the air Larry explained: "Nadia was the one who played, beautifully. I've dozens of her tapes. Oh, but look."

Simone had uncurled herself and now sat attentively upon her pillow, eyes fixed upon the piano keys as if the music were issuing from the instrument itself. Evelyn West said: "Is it my imagination or is she actually smiling?"

"She adored hearing Nadia play. You won't believe this, but she actually *tells* me when she wants to hear music. Leaps up on the piano and paws at the keys. And looks at me. If I don't instantly put on a tape she makes the most mournful noise."

"Extraordinary."

"At first I tried to ignore her, but then she'd become very naughty. Very naughty indeed."

Mrs. West appeared not to find this as cutely amusing as did Larry. "Wasn't it some French poet who wrote about cats taking over their owners' lives?"

Larry didn't dispute this. "Quite true in our case, but I suppose I encouraged it. You'll think me very weak and silly, I'm sure, but by spoiling and pampering Simone it's almost as if Nadia hadn't altogether disappeared from my life. Losing Simone would be like losing Nadia all over again. I couldn't bear that."

"Still, it's bound to happen eventually." Mrs. West's heavily gemmed fingers played about her lips, as if to shield her response from Simone's sleek and pointed ears. "Of course I know nothing about the life expectancy of cats, except the old saw about their having nine lives."

"When Simone is truly, truly wicked, and she can be when she doesn't get her own way," said Larry, "I tell her she's already had one life too many and she'd better watch her step. But she knows I dote on her. I vowed to Nadia I'd devote myself to Simone as long as she lived. We both adored her. A child couldn't have been dearer to us."

Mrs. West concealed her annoyance as best she could on the occasion of her inviting Larry across the hall to the first of those intimate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

candlelight dinners which were to become a custom in the ensuing weeks.

"I'd be delighted," he said. "May I assume the invitation includes Simone?"

"Well . . ."

"She can be very naughty if she's left alone."

"I'm afraid I've no cat food to offer her."

"Oh, she's much too finicky for that stuff. Shrimp is her passion. Something I couldn't eat if I were starving."

Entering the apartment, Simone sniffed once or twice, twitched her tail, and bestowed a passing, disdainful glance upon her hostess before settling herself upon the most comfortable of Mrs. West's chairs, rousing herself only to nibble greedily upon niblets of shrimp fed to her upon Larry's palm. Mrs. West forbore to betray her true feelings about this performance, only remarking with mild satire upon Simone's good fortune in having so devoted a master.

"I'm not sure master is quite the appropriate word," said Larry. "Can a master be enslaved?"

"At least you admit you are," said Mrs. West with a tight little smile.

"And superstitious as well. Apart from my own feelings for Simone, I'm certain something dreadful would happen if I were to betray my vow to Nadia."

"Forgive me, dear, but do you think it quite wise to invest such devotion in a pet? You mentioned the possibility of my remarrying. But what about you? You're so very young. Could you expect another woman to tolerate so autocratic a creature? Jealousy aside, I'm afraid *I* should find the requirement insufferable."

Larry was quick to agree. "Ah, but if I were to marry again, of course I'd have no choice but to part with Simone if she were a threat to domestic harmony."

Brightening at this, Mrs. West refilled their wineglasses, returned to her favorite theme of the emptiness of life when there is no one with whom to share it. The evening might have progressed even more favorably had not Simone, the moment Larry and Mrs. West settled themselves side by side on the sofa, sprung down from her chair and marched straight to the door where she turned, patrician head arrogantly uplifted, uttered a sharply peremptory miaow, raised one slender paw, and scratched a long, visible mark upon the beautifully lacquered door.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. West. "You naughty, wicked creature."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Larry leaped up, flustered and apologetic. "Awfully sorry, Evelyn. We'd best call it a night. I've learned never to argue with Simone. She's rather like Nadia in that respect."

"How droll," observed Mrs. West with more than a hint of constraint, "to be chaperoned by a cat."

Notwithstanding Simone's unmistakable jealousy and Mrs. West's frank disapproval of Larry's subservience to his pet, the relationship between the neighbors ripened quickly from friendship into something altogether more promising as they discovered more and more evidence of compatibility. The romance, if that's what it was, progressed within the venue of their two apartments, Larry having vetoed Mrs. West's suggestion that they might occasionally eat out. "I can't think of a single restaurant that admits cats," he'd argued.

"My *dear,* I'm not suggesting Simone should accompany us."

"Leave her at home, you mean? Alone? My darling Evelyn, I thought I'd explained all that. I'm not being whimsical. Don't you think I've tried leaving her alone? Have you any idea how destructive Simone can be? Malicious vandalism doesn't begin to describe it."

"Larry, it's all too absurd. You make her sound like a jealous, pathologically possessive *wife.* As you persist in likening her to Nadia, one can only wonder if *she* had the same temperament."

Larry looked away with a pained expression. "I suppose others might have seen her like that. I was everything to Nadia. We were so happy, Nadia, Simone, and I."

"Very touching, I'm sure, but to have transferred your feelings for Nadia to Simone, well, no offense, dear, but is it quite—quite healthy?"

Larry regarded Mrs. West with a wounded look in his deep-set eyes. "You're telling me I should—should—"

"Get *rid* of her, darling."

Larry reacted with shocked disapproval. "You don't know what you're asking. Why, it would be like—like killing Nadia."

"Silly boy, I'm not saying you should *kill* her. Give her away, adopt her out, take her to the SPCA."

"It would be the same thing. I couldn't do it, Evelyn. I could never live with myself. And I'd be so alone."

Mrs. West seized his hand. "Are you saying I've quite misunderstood all that's happened between us? Am I still no more than a next-door neighbor?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Larry returned her gaze with a hopeful, meltingly radiant smile. "God, Evelyn, you must know how I want to be more than that to you. But I keep remembering what you said when we first met, about having to be so careful. If I were to think you mistrusted my motives—oh, I may as well say it. From what you've told me about your investments I know I'm not as well off as you. I may seem to lack for nothing, but actually—"

"Hush," said Mrs. West sternly. "I won't allow you to let pride stand between us. I'm just as bad. I keep asking myself how a man like you could possibly find me attractive. Let's face it, I'm no beauty. I'm not old enough to be your mother but there is the age difference."

Larry moved to pick up Nadia's photograph and thrust it toward Mrs. West. "You must be aware that Nadia was older than I. It made absolutely no difference."

"Are you saying you would even contemplate the idea of our—marrying?"

Larry took both her hands in his. "If I hadn't believed it was the most hopeless folly I'd have asked you to marry me weeks ago."

This emotional exchange was interrupted by a rudely discordant noise. They both jumped. Simone, tail madly twitching, lay crouched on the piano pawing at the keys.

For the first time in over a year Larry looked forward almost with pleasure to the monthly visit from Nadia's lawyer, the insufferable Mr. Gilfoyle.

He arrived wearing his usual priggish air of being obliged to fulfill a duty as odious to him as it was to Larry, and wishing it to be as brief as possible, wasting no time on even the slightest of amenities.

"She's been well, I take it."

"See for yourself."

Gilfoyle opened his briefcase, drew out a pair of kidskin gloves, and donned them with an air of frank distaste before proceeding to lift Simone gingerly from her cushion, turning her this way and that as if to examine each and every inch of her.

Larry giggled. "Don't worry, it *is* the one and only original Simone. Do you really think I could find an identical substitute to fool you with if the darling puss had passed to her reward?"

"I'm sure you'd be capable of something far more devious." The lawyer dropped Simone and drew off his gloves.

Larry smirked. "Satisfied, are we?"

"About Simone? Quite."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, come on, Gilfoyle, don't you ever give up?"

"If you're alluding to my suspicions about Nadia's death, no, I shall never give up. It was no accident, we both know that. Had there been a shred of hard evidence, you would have got what you deserved. Thank God Nadia had more sense than you credited her with. Her fatal mistake was in letting you believe you'd inherit everything if something happened to her."

Larry scoffed. "She was a neurotic, possessive egotist."

Gilfoyle regarded him with an archly malicious smile. "Nothing in years has given me as much pleasure as seeing your face when I read Nadia's will. When you learned none of it would be yours. This apartment, the money, nothing. That you'd be no more than a trustee of the estate—and only so long as Simone lived."

Larry uttered a weakly indignant protest. "I never tried to contest the will."

"Under the circumstances you knew it would be imprudent."

"You think that wretched feline is the only thing standing between me and starvation? You underestimate me, Gilfoyle."

"Not anymore. I'm keeping my eye on you, Roemer. Play any of your tricks on some other gullible woman and you may find your reputation catching up with you."

Larry thrust out his jaw. "Spying on me, are you?"

"Let's just say I remain an interested observer."

Larry relished his secret, that Nadia's successor lived much too close to him to be spied upon by an outsider. And once he and Evelyn were married they would not remain in this city. That would be his condition, just as Evelyn had made hers.

Nor did the love-struck lady offer any objections. "Darling, of course I understand. I wouldn't expect you to stay in this building, even in this town, with all its painful memories. We can live anywhere we wish."

"But without Simone." Larry affected a look of profound melancholy.

Mrs. West patted his arm. "I'm sorry, darling. It's not just Simone. I'd feel the same way about any cat."

"I understand perfectly," he said. "But that *I* must be the one to cast her off. How shall I be able to live with that on my conscience? It'll be like betraying Nadia."

"I know, dear boy, I know. It's like asking you to abandon your own child. But I'll make it up to you. I promise I will."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Plans progressed smoothly. There would be a simple, private ceremony. Absolutely no publicity, and then removal to another part of the country. Or perhaps a pleasant, peripatetic lifestyle: the Riviera, Spain, Mexico, with eventually perhaps a home in the West, San Francisco or Southern California. The wedding day was agreed upon. They talked of everything—everything except the distressing detail of what to do about Simone.

In the end, the problem solved itself almost by accident. One morning as Larry was on his knees rummaging through Nadia's heavy, ornately carved cedar chest, he felt the shivery caress of Simone's body against his leg. As he recoiled, his elbow struck the edge of the chest with sufficient force to cause the lid to slam shut. Larry muttered an oath, then smiled. With sudden decisiveness he scooped Simone into his arms, raised the lid of the cedar chest, dropped Simone atop the linens, and slammed the lid shut. There followed a nerve-rattling series of the most enraged yowls, barely muffled. Larry felt a stab of superstitious terror, almost identical to the panic that had swept over him moments after the "accident" that had claimed Nadia's life. The noises coming from the cedar chest sounded eerily human.

Larry scrambled to his feet and fled from the apartment, pausing after locking the door to make sure no sounds from the bedroom could be heard in the corridor. He relaxed only when he was in his car and driving onto the highway. He wondered how long it would take before Simone exhausted all the oxygen in the cedar chest.

Presently, he stopped at a phone booth and called Mrs. West. "Darling, I'm in town. Some last-minute shopping, and then I want to say goodbye to some old friends. I might be late for dinner."

"Is Simone with you?"

"No. She was napping when I left so I thought I'd take a chance and slip out. Just pray she doesn't wake up before I get back."

"Listen, darling," said Mrs. West, "I'm afraid I must cancel dinner. I phoned my lawyer and the wretched man's leaving tonight for some conference. So I agreed to have dinner with him and then go over some tiresome papers. Don't worry, though. I'm leaving a casserole for you in the fridge and a treat for Simone."

Larry made kissing sounds into the phone. "You're already starting to spoil me, love."

With time to reflect on his actions, Larry was unable to explain to himself why he wished Evelyn West to believe Simone's death to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have been an accident for which he was not responsible—unless by carelessly forgetting to shut the cedar chest before leaving the house. It was rather like those days following Nadia's death when he'd been obliged to convince a number of people that what had happened had been through no fault of his own.

Driving home, he rehearsed in his mind the bereaved role he must play as he demonstrated to Mrs. West what must have happened, how Simone must have awakened while he was out, jumped into the cedar chest, and jarred the lid shut. Before parking his car in his space alongside the condo he made sure Evelyn's Cadillac was not there. He sprinted up the stairs, entered Mrs. West's apartment with the key she'd given him some weeks before, removed the two covered dishes from the refrigerator, and crossed the hall to his own door. He paused, once inside. Total silence. Leaving the dishes on the kitchen counter, he stole into the bedroom, hesitated once more, then gently raised the cedar chest lid.

One might have thought Simone was asleep, nestled there among the disheveled linens. Larry made sure she was not breathing, then shut the lid and returned to the kitchen. He was suddenly ravenous. Popping the chicken casserole into the microwave, he wrinkled his nose at the other dish. He was about to dump it into the disposal when hunger overcame his aversion. He wolfed down Simone's shrimp.

What a shame, he thought; the condemned had been given no chance to eat her last meal.

In a state of quickening suspense and apprehension, Mrs. West waited in her apartment for Larry's tap on the door. She could only hope that when she confessed what she'd done, Larry would understand that her motive in doing it had been to spare him the agony of having to do it himself. Let the burden of guilt for Simone's death rest upon her conscience, not upon his. If he truly loved her he would forgive her.

She knew he must be home. The dishes had been removed from her refrigerator. And surely it must be over by now. She knew the substance with which she'd poisoned the shrimp worked swiftly.

Darling Larry, what a lifesaver he'd proved to be. She truly believed that if she hadn't met him when she did she would have used that poison on herself, so profound had been her depression after dear Albert's death.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Unable to bear the suspense any longer, she finally stepped across the hall. Putting her ear to Larry's door, she listened intently. There was no sound from within the apartment. And no answer when she knocked. ●

## DETECTIVERSES

### *WHO WAS THAT MASKED MAN AND HOW DID HE GET AWAY WITH IT?*

*by SEYMOUR KAPETANSKY*

Why did they call the Ranger "Lone"
When he was never on his own?
Could he the Rule of Law enforce
Without stout Silver, his great horse?
Could he track down those outlaws pronto
Without his Indian sidekick Tonto?
And since his work produced no pay,
Who was it paid his bills each day?
WHY DID THEY CALL THE RANGER "LONE"
WHEN HE WAS NEVER ON HIS OWN?

*(reprinted from EQMM 6/92)*

### *IN DEFENSE OF THE LONE RANGER!*

*a reply by JANET WEST*

You young folk don't know so gol durn much,
The LONE RANGER was the *only* one left of a bunch.
Tonto and Silver, well that's a long story,
By friendship and capture, but you'd think that boring.
We who are older and very much wiser
Remember the ranger as quite a disguiser.
Perchance the old prospector was how he got pay,
Panning for gold on some easy day!
Or maybe his name got misspelled by some rogue,
For today the *LOAN* RANGER is much more in vogue.
But if it's the latter by some misque,
The ranger was sure to pay all that was due!
He's still our hero of days gone past,
Because he had values that always last!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE JURY BOX
## by JON L. BREEN

It has been a continuing refrain of this department that too many recent crime and mystery novels are far longer than they ought to be, padded beyond optimum length because of the market demand for bigger books. Some readers, I know, like leisurely paced books. What, they may ask, is the difference between rich detail and padding? The latest from one of my favorite writers, whose books are *always* leisurely in pace and *sometimes* padded, can be offered as an example.

*** Anne Perry: *Farriers' Lane,* Fawcett Columbine, $20. If one character recounts to another events the reader has already been privy to without adding anything of significance, that's padding. In the early stages of the latest Victorian mystery about Charlotte and Thomas Pitt, amateur sleuth Charlotte does this *twice.* The novel gains momentum, offering the usual elements: a thoroughly researched period background, bizarre crimes (most notably a crucifixion murder several years before the main action, for which a Jewish actor may have been wrongfully hanged), and an even more extensive than usual cast of interesting suspects, most involved either with the law or the theatre. Detecting fever continues to spread through the Pitt household with maid Gracie making a significant contribution to the investigation. Are the children next?

*** Bernard Bastable: *To Die Like a Gentleman,* St. Martin's, $16.95. *EQMM* favorite Robert Barnard, writing under a new unconcealed pseudonym, offers a much more economical Victorian mystery, involving the household of tyrannical gout sufferer Sir Richard Hudson, who has surrounded himself with potential murderers among his family, employees, and other acquaintances. Partly written in letters and diaries, the novel reveals a mastery of period style plus the irony and deft plotting for which Barnard's contemporary mysteries are so notable. (Students of English literature will especially enjoy the offstage appearance in the story of one of the great nineteenth-century novelists.)

**** Steve Martini: *Prime Witness,* Putnam, $21.95. The second novel about California lawyer Paul Madriani may be even better than 1992's *Compelling Evidence.* Temporarily on the prosecutorial side of the street, Madriani tries to make a case against Russian Andre Iganovich for the ritual murders of two pairs of college students while looking for the apparent copy-cat killer of a third couple. The combination of style, vivid character drawing, masterfully devious plotting, and inside knowledge of the judicial process put Martini in the very front rank of legal thriller writers.

*** Tony Hillerman: *Sacred Clowns,* HarperCollins, $23. The first novel about Navajo cops Joe Leaphorn and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jim Chee since 1990's *Coyote Waits* is something of a departure for the series: mellower and lighter-toned with an extra measure of humor. (Especially enjoyable is the account of a screening of John Ford's *Cheyenne Autumn,* in which Navajo bit actors played a durable practical joke on the white man.) Though the plot, involving the murders of a high school shop teacher and a *koshare* (the clownlike figure in a tribal ceremonial) is suitably complex, the personal and romantic lives of the two heroes are more central than ever.

*** Al Sarrantonio: *Summer Cool,* Walker, $19.95. Ex-cop Jack Paine is asked for help by the wife of Bob Petty, a police colleague and friend who has unaccountably disappeared. Even when Terry Petty decides to write the missing husband out of her life, Paine carries on relentlessly through a maze of drug dealing and official cover-up to find the truth. Sarrantonio is one of those suspense writers who go for the big emotional effects—think of Cornell Woolrich, Steve Fisher, and among current practitioners Bill Pronzini and Ed Gorman. He is also admirably economical, telling a fully developed story in a mere 141 pages.

*** Mabel Maney: *The Case of the Not-So-Nice Nurse,* Cleis Press, P.O. Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221; $24.95 cloth, $9.95 paper. In a novel labelled "A Nancy Clue Mystery," naive but conscientious young nurse Cherry Aimless plans a trip to San Francisco to visit her Aunt Gertrude. She encounters mystery, adventure, and sexual awakening. In a gem of book-length parody, the author faithfully hews to the narrative and plotting style of juvenile series fiction, her remarkably straight face making the goings on all the funnier. I loved this book, but it isn't for everybody: if the idea of a lesbian encounter between Cherry Ames and Nancy Drew offends your taste, better give it a miss.

*** Max Allan Collins: *In the Line of Fire,* Jove, $4.99. Ordinarily a movie novelization is the last thing I'd review in this space, but this is the first I've ever seen with a bibliography. Always a conscientious pro, Collins uses added character touches and historical tidbits to fill out Jeff Maguire's fine screenplay about Secret Service Agent Frank Horrigan, who blames himself for losing Kennedy in 1963 and now is taunted by a mad assassin determined to take out the current president. First priority is to see the movie, a potential classic of suspense directed by Wolfgang Petersen with memorable performances by Clint Eastwood and John Malkovich, but the novel is worth a look too.

** Patricia Moyes: *Twice in a Blue Moon,* Holt, $19.95. The latest about Scotland Yard's Henry Tibbett and wife Emmy is narrated by Susan Gardiner, a young woman whose flourishing country restaurant is plagued by the deaths of customers via poisonous mushrooms. The current deaths may have some connection to a murder (complete with rumored ghosts) in the establishment's past. The venerable series' customary smooth readability and comfortable charm are in evidence, but there is a big problem: one character seems such an obvious villain from first appearance that the experienced mystery reader has cause to hope that *surely* a double reverse of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some sort must be in the offing.

Fans of Lord Peter Wimsey's creator must acquire *Dorothy L. Sayers: The Centenary Celebration* (Walker, $18.95), edited by Alzina Stone Dale. Among the essayists celebrating Sayers are mystery novelists Carolyn G. Heilbrun (Amanda Cross), Michael Gilbert, William F. Love, Carolyn G. Hart, Catherine Aird, Sharyn McCrumb, Aaron Elkins, Anne Perry, Ralph McInerny, and H.R.F. Keating. The late Ian Stuart offers a well-considered contrarian view.

Another secondary source is more expensive and aimed at a more specialized market, but if you're a serious student of the late Leslie Charteris and his immortal character Simon Templar, you'll want to read Burl Barer's *The Saint: A Complete History in Print, Radio, Film and Television* . . . (McFarland, Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640; $55)

Prominent among the reprints is a new trade paperback edition of Harlan Ellison's great 1975 collection *Deathbird Stories* (Collier, $9), leading off with the Edgar-winning "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs" and continuing with other brilliant and disturbing stories that partake of crime, fantasy, horror, and science fiction elements but at their core are pure and unique Ellison.

All the attention accorded Michael Crichton via *Jurassic Park* and *Rising Sun* have prompted a new hardcover edition of his Edgar-winning 1968 novel, *A Case of Need* (Dutton, $18.95), originally published as by Jeffrey Hudson. Concerning a pathologist's efforts to clear a doctor friend accused of abortion (still illegal in the days before Roe v. Wade), it's a splendid book that merits the same classic status among medical thrillers as Hillary Waugh's *Last Seen Wearing* among police procedurals or Robert Traver's *Anatomy of a Murder* among courtroom novels.

The generous new anthology from the editors of *Mystery Scene* magazine, *Hollywood Kills* (Carroll & Graf, $21), partakes of the recent trend toward including book-length works along with the short stories, in this case William Campbell Gault's excellent 1959 novel of the movie world, *Death Out of Focus*. Bestselling historical novelist John Jakes, once a prolific contributor to this and other fiction magazines, provides a brief introduction. Among the other contributors of tinseltown mystery and horror tales are Robert Bloch, Fritz Leiber, Ross Macdonald, and Ed Gorman.

I have only one complaint about Lawrence Treat's latest book of entertaining and challenging picture mysteries, *Crime and Puzzlement 5: On Martha's Vineyard Mostly* (Holt, $7.95), illustrated by Paul Karasik. The back-cover blurb says it's "For Ages 8 to 80 only," thus ruling out the book's own author, who turns 90 in 1993.

*© 1993 by Jon L. Breen.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Roger Ormerod's first big break as a writer came with two fifty-minute television plays produced in 1972. Shortly thereafter, he began to write detective novels and has had an average of two per year published ever since. Novel-writing has left him very little time for short fiction, with the result that this is only his second published short story. . . .*

# REBOUND

## by ROGER ORMEROD

It seems to have dogged me all my life, this uncanny ability always to be late, but it's helped me to develop a technique. "Oh . . . am I the last? I *do* apologise. . . ." And the quick glance at my watch, to suggest it wasn't my fault. The driver had the engine running. The coach was throbbing. Nobody smiled. Then, of course, you have to pay the price; you take what's left. In this case it was the choice of one vacant seat, beside a pretty bit of nonsense who was craning her neck to see what it was she'd been lumbered with.

I edged my way along and sat beside her. "Overslept," I told her.

She giggled. "Naughty man. Out late, were you?"

There were problems ahead, definitely. The way in which she nudged me told me the extent of them, and it abruptly occurred to me that the seating pattern had already been established, and that I was stuck with her . . . all the way to Dover, then through France, all the way south to San Desperado in southern Spain. And—heaven help me—probably at the hotel when we got there.

Nevertheless, she was distinctly restful to look at. Eighteen or so, I guessed, with a neat little figure and a sharp, pert face, splendidly expressive with those huge brown eyes and the way her cheeks dimpled when she smiled. As she did now, aware that I was looking sideways at her. Admiringly, she no doubt guessed. Well yes, that too, but I was considering the possibility of portraits. Perhaps with a telephoto lens to catch her when she didn't realise. But my interest was really in pictorial work.

*© 1993 by Roger Ormerod.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My name's Gladys," she told me, eyeing me doubtfully as though that might put me off. "Gladys Pyke. With a 'y' in it."

"Ah." I nodded. "And a 'w' in the Gladys?"

She frowned. "Don't be silly."

"Arnold," I introduced myself. "Arnold Furst. With a 'u,' " I told her.

"And the Furst was last!" She threw back her head and laughed heartily, piercingly. People in front turned to stare. People behind rustled and whispered.

"Well . . . so I was," I agreed. "You're very quick. On the ball."

"Cheeky."

That silenced me. In what way had I been cheeky?

But it didn't silence her for long. I was beginning to think that nothing would.

"Do you *always* carry that thing?" she asked, breaking off in the middle of a two-minute sentence.

It was a few moments before I realised she meant the camera hanging against my chest. "Oh yes," I said. "Always."

"In bed? Doesn't it get in the way—"

I didn't let her finish that. "All my waking hours," I told her solemnly. "You never know when something special might crop up."

"You're a snapshotter!" she cried, as though it was a terrible disease.

I sighed. "A photographer. An amateur. Call me a serious amateur. I take photographs, not snaps."

I was, in fact, trying to put a folio together for my associateship of the Royal Photographic Society. I didn't say so. She wouldn't have known what it meant. "Harbours," I intended to call it. The one at San Desperado was legendary.

"Oh . . . you can have *me!*" she cried in ecstasy. She struck a cheeky pose, finger to her chin, and her eyes danced.

I told her I would think about it.

We then covered a fair mileage, during which she didn't speak. No doubt the occasion when a man dismissed the opportunity of having her had not previously arisen.

The cross-channel ferry was a misery. She insisted on walking the deck, and the sea was somewhat active, with spray everywhere. She loved it. She clung to me in mock fear. She raised spray-splattered features to me. I adopted a neutral attitude, not responding apart from the odd careless laugh, but indeed feeling uneasy, though terror wasn't far away. I mean, it had been only two months since

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the death of my wife. Wasn't I supposed to be in mourning? And how could I mourn satisfactorily with a soft and cuddlesome female clinging to me and her eyes telling me all sorts of things you just can't capture with even the best of cameras? And I was at the moment carrying it, which is not a good idea with the sea spray around. I'd put it in a plastic bag, and it was hanging, as usual, against my chest. Consequently, any clasping she found necessary had to be from behind, so that she could put her arms round my waist. I am rather tall; she was five feet of nothing much, but soft and beautifully shaped. . . . I realised she was getting to me, and concentrated on eternity. She couldn't grasp my waist, apparently, without reaching upwards, which she didn't trouble to do.

"Shall we go inside and search out a coffee?" I asked.

"Oh . . . you . . . " she said, slapping the back of my hand.

We went inside for coffee, the spray now sweeping the side windows. I placed the camera securely on the table, my left arm through the strap in case a sudden roll might slide it off. She was looking at me with two tiny wrinkles on the ridge of her small, slightly tip-tilted nose.

"You love that thing, don't you," she said. It was not a question. She had developed a special jealousy for it.

"I enjoy using it," I told her.

She hadn't yet seen the full equipment. The camera was a Leica M6, the rangefinder model, to which I had fitted the standard lens. In my baggage were the rest: my two telephoto lenses and the wide-angle one, and my flashgun just in case. Back home I had a darkroom, in which I had brought my technique just about to the peak of my ability.

"Yes," I decided. "You could say I have a deep affection for it."

That baffled her. The frown deepened, and the two little lines were now three.

"You're not . . . queer?" she ventured.

"You mean . . ." I made the customary gesture, hand to hip.

She nodded, lower lip between her teeth.

"No," I said, laughing lightly. "I'm not like that."

And I just managed to stop myself from telling her that my wife had been.

The three little lines disappeared.

We docked. I lost her then, and held back. There was just a chance that the seating arrangements would now be different. But no. We

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had the same coach and the same driver. I was last aboard again, and she waved frantically.

"Where have you *been?*"

I had taken a brisk walk along the dockside. A dozen first-rate shots, if I wasn't mistaken, were now in the camera.

We were making an overnight stop, halfway. Accommodation was booked, rooms had been allocated. I prayed that our individual rooms might be widely separated. But no . . . we were next door to each other. She had prattled her way through four hundred miles, and what I needed was a shower. My room had no shower. I was just about to search out a bathroom when she burst in. Idiot—I hadn't locked the door.

"Have you *seen* the view!" she cried.

Yes, I'd noted it. Wooded slopes in all directions and the tiny township clustered in the valley. Photogenic, is the word.

"Yes," I said. "I noticed. After dinner I'll get out for an hour—evening sun, you know."

"Ooh! Romantic."

"With my camera," I told her, meaning alone with it.

"That'll be lovely. Where shall we go? Oh—were you going to have a shower?"

Why else would I be standing there in my boxer shorts and holding a towel and soap?

"I was about to search for one."

"Oh—you can share mine."

I didn't think she meant literally. In any event, there was room for only one person in that tiny cubicle. But she might just as well have been in there with me, for all the privacy I got. There was a tatty plastic curtain, just hanging on its last two rings. For twenty seconds I relaxed in sublime pleasure. Then she called out, "What's this little lever do?"

I had left the camera on her table, on which she was now perched. In two seconds I was beside her. "Don't *touch* it!" I was brisk with her.

"All right, all right," she said, pouting. "I won't touch it. Nor your silly camera."

I went back to the shower. As I couldn't remember where I'd got to, I started again. I towelled off, draped it round my middle, and headed back to my room. She hung in the doorway.

"Don't be long, it's nosh time," she said.

"I'll be there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a slight constraint between us. I felt I'd been too abrupt with her. But once at San Desperado, I'd be able to shake her off. Or so I encouraged myself.

In the dining room she was waiting at a table for two. "Here I am!" she shouted, standing up and waving. I weaved my way through the packed and grinning diners.

"Did you have to bring that thing?" she asked.

I put the camera on the table. She frowned at it. "Does it snore?" she asked, but I ignored that.

We ate. How she found room for it all I couldn't guess. She ate twice as much as I did. "Lost your appetite?" she asked.

"No," I said. "Just anxious to get outside."

"Oh . . . you . . . " She prodded my camera with a fork. Then she perked up. "Give me two minutes, and I'll be with you."

Then she was up and away, and half an hour later she reappeared. What she considered suitable walking equipment would not have been found inappropriate for an evening at the opera.

By that time I'd lost the best of the light, so it had to be no more than a short walk. She protested. Semi-high heels don't go with wooded slopes.

"Get yourself some trainers," I told her. "I'll pay for them."

"What'd I want those for?"

"Walking. When we get there. Round the bay. Up to the Old Town. You know." Here, I was taking a risk. She might have agreed.

She tugged at my arm. "If you think I'm going to walk my legs off . . ." She tossed her head and left it at that.

It seemed that I was going to be able to wander free when we got to San Desperado. My spirits rose.

"Race you back," I said.

"Don't be silly, Arnold, please."

I very nearly had to carry her the last half mile. She kissed me on the cheek as we parted. "Lovely man," she said. Then, outside her door, she whispered, "We'll have a marvellous time, Arnie. You'll see. I've been three times to the same hotel, and the pool's divine."

She left me wondering what the devil she meant. In my room I considered the image presented by the mirror. Thirty-two and looked forty. Craggy face, hair receding, eyes no colour that mattered, mouth sullen. What the hell did she see in me? For a moment I considered slashing my face with a razor blade, further to ruin the image. But no—she would consider the result romantic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But the next morning . . . to San Desperado, and my freedom. Mentally, I urged the coach onwards. She talked. I learned the full history of her family, about the pitiful inadequacy of her father, and was treated to a round-by-round discourse of her seventeen or so tragic love affairs.

"Children!" she cried. "Not grown up. Not like you, Arnie."

"I am old enough," I informed her with a certain amount of dignity, "to be your father."

"But he's ancient!"

Which was exactly how I felt.

I was trapped. She extracted from me the fact of my wife's tragic death, though I grimly held on to the how and the why. She was sympathetic. I didn't want sympathy, because, I suppose, of a feeling of subliminal guilt. Had I done enough to help my wife? I found myself describing the tiny semi in which I now lived.

"On your own?" she asked, shocked.

"Of course." And enjoying every minute, but I didn't tell her that. I was proud of my darkroom in the tiny third bedroom, so I told her about that room.

"Ooh!" she exclaimed. "Just right for the babs."

I didn't know whether she meant this in the singular or the plural. In either event, I'd clearly gone too far in our intimacy, and pretended to doze off.

But we did eventually reach the hotel. As I knew, having chosen it from the picture in the brochure, it stood on a promontory overlooking the bay. My window had a splendid view. The light shimmered on the water and the multicoloured sails of the fishing boats called to me, lazily canting and catching the warm light of the lowering sun. In the morning, I thought, working out where the sun would be at sunrise, I would be at the other end of that bay. At six-thirty.

Gladys must have inherited a talent for bribery. In any event, however she managed it, she had the room next to mine. As I was contemplating the coming pleasures, she burst in. Didn't she ever knock?

"Have you seen the bay?" I asked.

"Have you seen the pool?" she asked.

We stared at each other. We said no more, but went down to dinner. I took the camera.

"Why d'you want *that?*" She pointed at it.

"I'm out and round the bay, afterwards," I told her. "Coming?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You must be out of your mind."

"No. It's what I came for."

"Then," she said, lifting her chin and flipping that splendid flow of hair back over her shoulders, "you can do it without me. I'll be in the bar when you get back."

"Good," I said. "Fine."

Oh blessed freedom! I must admit, though, that photography is not a sociable interest. One really needs to be alone. There's the concentration, the hanging about waiting for the exact moment when everything comes together, the slant of the light, the shapes, the colours. And that exciting splash of red! I love reds. All this, for a companion, would be terribly boring.

Alone, I was. I'd taken with me the tripod, my camera with the two lenses, and a fast film for when the light went. There were the café lights, you see, the streetlamps, the last vestiges of the sun on the gentle waves. I got back at ten-thirty.

She was there in the bar, alone in a corner with an empty glass. I said sorry, and hoped she hadn't been waiting long, and could I get her another drink? She said if she had another she would fall off the chair.

There were quite a number of younger men in the bar, more her age, her temperament. I wondered how she'd kept them at bay, and felt mildly inflated that she had. And then, less mildly, panic-stricken.

"I had to see you," she said.

"Oh . . . why?" Were we at the good-night kiss stage? Or worse!

"What time do you get up?"

"I'll be up at six." The morning light, I thought. Two hours round the bay before breakfast.

"Oh . . . good." She cheered up. "That's lovely."

"D'you want to come?" I offered. Better to have her with me than hanging around waiting.

"No! Oh, you *are* silly," she told me. "I want you to do something for me."

I was suspicious. "What?"

"People rush down and reserve them," she explained.

"Then why not you?" I had no idea what she was talking about.

"I'm never awake before eight. So I want you to do it for me. Reserve one," she explained, frowning at my no doubt blank expression.

"Reserve what?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A sun-bed by the pool—for me. You'll have to come down and lie on it, and I'll come after breakfast and take over."

"No," I said.

She began to cry. I can't stand women crying. My wife cried a lot.

"You won't do *anything* for me!" she wept.

"Just this once then."

"Straight down and lie on it?"

"Yes," I said tersely. I could see my morning lost and gone. My breakfast, too.

"Oh . . . you *are* good to me!" Her tears were dry now. Then she kissed me on the lips and was gone.

I got down at six-thirty, lay on a sun-bed close to the water with my camera on my stomach, and waited. Then I saw what she meant. They came down in relays, leaving perhaps a baby in a carry-cot to reserve a sun-bed.

She came at ten. "Oh thank you!" she bubbled.

She was in a bikini you could have sneezed into the bay. She stretched herself out.

"Is that all you do?" I asked.

"Oh yes."

"The whole fortnight?"

"Of course. What else is there?"

She smelt very strongly of a protective spray against sunburn. I could have explained all about ultraviolet light, as I used a filter against it on each lens.

It was now too late for any chance of decent photography. The sun was a flat glare, and anything I took would be too contrasty. I wore my wide-brimmed straw hat to protect my face and walked up to the Old Town. A shot or two there . . . but I really needed early morning or late evening light.

Already, I could see my mornings ruined. What else was there to do? Gawd help us!

I picked her up for lunch. She was cooking nicely. I warned her about sunburn and sunstroke—but she was a veteran. She had her magic spray can. Apparently, to return home without a tan like a chestnut would signify dismal failure.

After lunch, I went and sat with her, my camera on the sun-bed.

"Aren't you going to take one for me?" She stretched out in a sexy pose.

"No," I said.

"Why not?" She pouted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's not my line."

"I hope you're not going off again this evening."

"Early dinner," I said, "then out and around the bay."

"Rotten devil. Leaving me on my own."

"It's what I've come for—photographs. You could come—"

"Your frigging camera!" she cut in violently. Then she picked it up and threw it out over the pool.

I watched its flight, unable to breathe, to shout out, even to moan. That camera and lens would have bought me a decent secondhand car.

A passing swimmer raised a hand from the water and caught it in mid-flight, tossed it back, and shouted something in German. I yelled something back, in English, and turned to Gladys.

"Sorry," she whispered, biting her lower lip.

I got up and walked away. Had to. I had had no intention of going out until the evening, but didn't dare to stay near her, so I went to waste the time until dinner up in the Old Town. There, eventually, I ate, in a small café, still reluctant to return to the hotel. No tourists, it seemed, came up there to eat. I was a curiosity. I wandered the narrow streets, the tortuous byways, climbed the steep steps. And everywhere there was a gem of a shot. In fact, I was confident that those two spools of film alone would get me my ARPS. I knew it then, felt it, with one of those upsurges of satisfaction so rarely encountered. I glanced at my watch. Too late for dinner. On the way back I called in at a little shop and bought my own little spray can.

She was sitting on the entrance steps. She looked up, her lower lip jutting. "Rotten pig!" she said.

"I thought it better to keep the camera away—"

"What d'you want me to do—kiss it better?"

I sat beside her. "Coming in for a drink?" I suggested.

"I suppose I'd better. I'm not going to get to sleep if I don't. Been asleep most of the day. Nobody to talk to . . ."

"What . . . with all those healthy and hearty young men about?"

She got to her feet, smoothing the flimsy bit of skirt that was supposed to make the bikini reasonably decent. "I can't stand 'em. Kids. Stupid. I like my men mature."

I guessed that her disparaging remarks about her father had been her inverted feelings for him. She hadn't wished to betray how much she loved him.

"Don't worry about not sleeping," I told her. "I've got something for that."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I took her into the bar. We had one miserable, silent drink each, then we went up to our rooms. I nipped into mine and found the small bottle in the corner of my suitcase.

She was sitting on the edge of her bed. I tipped a tablet into my palm. "Only half of one of these," I told her. "They're powerful."

I cut it in half on the bedside table with my penknife. She took up the bit, stared at it doubtfully, and looked up at me. "It'll be all right?"

"Oh yes."

I didn't tell her that the tablets were what was left from the time my wife had last used them—fatally. Her woman friend had deserted her for another.

Gladys took it with a little water. I said, "Tell you what—I'll reserve two sun-beds in the morning. How'll that be?"

She stared at me blankly, then threw her arms round my neck and kissed me, laughed, and flopped back on her bed. I smiled down at her.

She whispered, "You don't have to leave, you know."

I shook my head. "I don't think so. Really . . ."

She pouted.

"You'll be asleep, anyway," I said consolingly. "Then you'd miss the best." She rolled over, pretending to sulk. I said, "Your back's a bit red. Did you know?"

"Yes. I can't spray my back properly."

"In the morning, I'll do it. If I may?"

She twisted round to look at me with glowing eyes. "Oh yes . . . please."

I leaned over and kissed her good night.

The following morning I was down early again. This time I put two sun-beds together and lay across them with the camera on my chest and the strap round my neck. You never knew, with her funny little moods.

For once she had an early breakfast and bounced out to the pool, sparkling. She had on her wisp of skirt and a fistful of jacket over the bikini.

"It's going to be a scorcher," I said, warningly.

"Lovely."

I went in for a quick breakfast, and hurried out again.

"How about doing your back?" I asked.

"Oh yes. My spray can's in my room." The implication was that I might fetch it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It'll be . . . " I hesitated, " . . . perhaps a bit . . . er . . . personal."

"Yes." Her eyes glowed.

So I asked an English couple I knew from the coach—I thought he was a doctor—if they'd mind sitting on the beds for a few minutes. They smiled, and of course they wouldn't mind at all. So, off we went to her room.

The little skirt came off, and the tiny jacket. I walked round her, spraying as I went. She pulled down the back of the bikini briefs and I crouched to spray her bottom. Psst!

"Ooh," she said. "It's cold."

I went round to the front, and she pulled it down again. Psst!

"Oooh!" she said.

Then the bra. She lifted it free. Psst! Psst!

Frankly, that bikini was so transparent that she might just as well have left it off.

I slipped the can I'd bought in Old Town back into my pocket. I'd used hers for the front of her, mine for the back.

The idea had been born out of desperation. In some way or other, I had to get her away from that blasted sun-bed and on her feet. My little can contained antiperspirant, so I reckoned she'd be suntanned on the front and sunburned on the back. Then she'd *have* to get on her feet, and frankly there was the tiny thought behind it that I would enjoy her company. I was dying to show her the Old Town.

We walked back down together. I was in shorts and a thin white shirt, the straw hat, and my linen jacket with all the pockets—and felt overdressed. We thanked the couple, and spread ourselves out, me with the camera on my chest.

After five minutes or so she said it really was hot, so I offered to fetch her a drink. She said oh yes please, so I went for it. Campari and soda, she liked.

"That's better," she said, and she lay back again, sucking an ice cube.

A quarter of an hour later I spoke to her, but she didn't reply. She was lying conveniently face down. I got to my feet and told her I was going up to the Old Town. No reply. So that was where I went, but this time by way of the far end of the bay, where I'd noticed a backwater into which all the detritus seemed to drift. Into this, I threw my near-empty spray can.

I spent the whole day up in the Old Town. By now I was beginning to be recognised, and I discovered that although very little English was spoken there, we shared French, which was how I earned my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

living, teaching it. They directed me to the most colourful quarters. By colourful I mean that was exactly what they were, with the sun slanting in along the rows of flowered balconies with the hanging baskets, washing strung across from house to house. And oh . . . those reds! They loved geraniums. And I concentrated. Gradually, a fierce, intense excitement seized me.

I walked back as the sun was going down. There was an ambulance parked in front of the hotel, men running briskly with a stretcher. I ran round after them—to the pool. There was a strange silence. No splashing and shouting, no laughter.

They parted for me. Gladys lay where I'd left her, which was the only way I recognised her. That and the bikini, which had almost disappeared in her swollen flesh. Her bottom was not the dainty and delightful thing it had been. I looked away, feeling sick. She was as red as a lobster, and for the same reason. But now I hated red.

They took her away. I stood there, the doctor at my elbow.

"Strange," he said, "that she didn't wake up."

I gave him one quick glance, then ran into the hotel, up the stairs two at a time, and crashed into her room. The other half of the tablet was no longer there. The realisation hit me. She had expected me to sneak away, and if I wasn't going to be there, she might as well sleep.

More slowly, I returned to the pool. They had taken her away. A Spaniard, slim and handsome, was talking to the doctor. He raised his eyes and looked at me, and shrugged. Then he took me away in his little car.

At their version of a police station, his eyes sadly on me, he asked what I knew about this incident, having informed me that she had *section-two burns* (by which I assumed he meant second-degree) and was in shock. They had her in hospital, and were fighting for her life.

I was feeling ill. At the same time, like a mother who's slapped a child, I felt a flood of tenderness for Gladys.

He was speaking perfect English. I find this very belittling, that anywhere on the Continent the officials speak good English, but we never learn their language. Infuriating. I tried my immaculate French on him, but he was even more fluent with that.

Then he left me in his little room, with a young uniformed officer to keep an eye on me. He probably also spoke English, but said not a word. Only grinned. They had taken my camera from me, and my straw hat, the former only after a bitter struggle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When he returned, he was grim and uncompromising. He'd got it all tied up. Lab reports had come in.

"Can you explain, Señor Furst, how she came to be sprayed with suntan oil on her front and antiperspirant on her back?"

I shook my head. Said nothing.

But . . . an Englishman, in this very same straw hat and a camera hanging against his chest, had been identified by the owner of the small shop I had visited. This Englishman had purchased a spray can of antiperspirant. Such a can, nearly empty, had been found where all the detritus of the bay ended up. They were confident they would be able to find my fingerprints on it. I said my feet sweated something terrible. He laughed. A nasty laugh.

"If she dies," he said flatly, "the charge will be murder. If she lives, it will be criminal assault." He nodded. *Think about that, feller.* And he left me to do so. A different young officer now stood and grinned at me, and nodded.

There was left to me only one desperate measure: deny everything. They could prove nothing. I'd done the spraying in the privacy of her room. Did they still have the death penalty for murder in Spain? I didn't dare to ask. And if they did . . . how? Oh Lord! Probably something involving a fighting bull.

I was losing control of my mind—sheer panic.

He returned. I asked after her welfare, surprised to find I did so out of concern for her and not myself. Damn it, I realised, I loved her. I had to face it. Loved her and wanted her.

He said there was no change. Now he was more purposeful. They'd found the bottle of tablets in my suitcase. They had also developed and printed the photos I'd taken that day. The cheek of it!

I frantically denied everything. He accused me of spraying her back with antiperspirant. I denied it hotly. Prove it, I said. So he showed me the results from my day in the Old Town.

They were terrible. It was as though I'd taken them in a fog. "Prove it, Señor Furst?" he asked. "I think I can. Please explain this." And he showed me my camera. The filter over the lens was covered with a nasty smudge like gear oil. And I knew. I could say nothing. The spray had bounced back from her dainty little bottom as I'd crouched to the job with the camera hanging on my chest.

There was nothing left to deny.

I am writing this in my little cell. Tomorrow, I'm due out. Three months for assault—I'd been lucky. The assault, the judges had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decided, had been unintentional. Coincidentally, Gladys is due out of the hospital the same day. I don't know that I can face her, though I'll have to. I must.

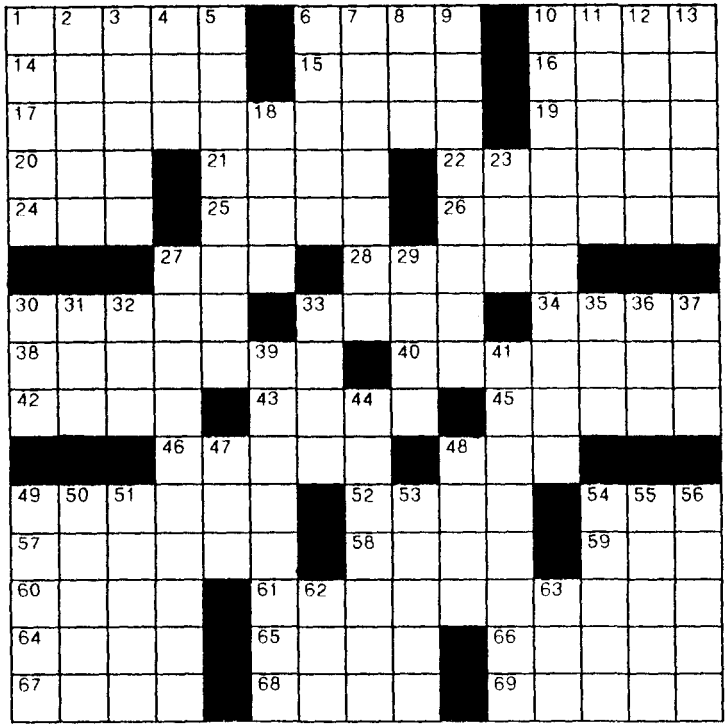
Manuel—I now know him by his Christian name—has kept me in touch with her progress. He's been visiting her nearly every day. "A young woman of admirable courage and spirit, Arnold," he told me. We are now friends. Everything's fixed up, timed to the minute. The wedding's to be in a week's time, giving me time to find my feet, as Manuel put it, and Gladys to get together her trousseau. Gladys and Manuel's wedding.

I'm to take the wedding photographs of the happy couple. I hope I haven't lost my touch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE MYSTERY CROSSWORD

by Janet Lumiansky



Solution on page 106

## ACROSS

1 Queried
6 African lake
10 Pit
14 Nantes' river
15 Path
16 Narc target
17 Kind of college contest
19 Large kangaroo
20 Small part
21 Act
22 French painter
24 Frigid
25 Vile
26 *C is for* ——
27 Slammer
28 Italian stairs
30 Marketplace
33 "L' —— c'est moi"
34 Run away
38 Earned
40 Wobbles
42 Middle European



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

43 Italian gulf
45 Acts politically
46 Fifi's farewell
48 Number 50 on a table
49 Kind of ancient church
52 —— the riot act
54 Barb
57 Become adjusted
58 Spiral motion
59 Fed. agency
60 —— of duty
61 Crescent City citizens, briefly
64 Do as I say
65 Bellow
66 Ice cream holders
67 Lose a lap
68 Titles
69 Attempt

**DOWN**

1 *A is for* ——
2 Before boom; after ultra
3 Pool
4 To —— is human
5 *D is for* ——
6 Concern of 27 Down
7 Most obdurate
8 Before phase or gram
9 Finely structured
10 Author of 26-Across, 1-Down, 5-Down, 41-Down, 44-Down
11 Appropriate
12 Peres' mates
13 Literary medium
18 Intend
23 Infamous Lon
27 Occupation of 10 Down's heroine
29 Roman statesman
30 Mornings, briefly
31 Solidify
32 Mouths
33 Ms. Adams
35 Permit
36 Before to Browning
37 Curve shape
39 Bouncers
41 *E is for* ——
44 *B is for* ——
47 Cacophony
48 O'Haras' place
49 Dye
50 Antelope
51 Languishes
53 Oglers
54 Most are blue
55 Breathlessness
56 Effervescent
62 Louis XIV, e.g.
63 Hawaiian hawks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*With a novel just completed and on its way to a publisher, Suzanne Jones recently turned her attention once again to short fiction. The result is a story that, like several of her earlier works, involves a journey into childhood . . .*

# THE GOOD KNIFE

## by SUZANNE JONES

The good knife was as much a part of my childhood as gathering eggs, feeding my horse, snapping string beans, and Sunday chicken dinners and church. It lay on a clean dishtowel on the left side of the kitchen sink when it was not in my grandmother's strong left hand, slicing tomatoes or cutting up chicken. Its blade was worn thin from years of whetting and was kept so sharp that it cut through cartilage and sinew as easily as cheese. I was never to touch it, and I never did. Except for that one time.

We weren't so poor that we had only the one knife, but it was the only one that would hold an edge. The others were useful only for prying open boxes, sawing ropes, cardboard, and the like: tasks judged unworthy of the fine edge of the good knife.

We lived—my mother and I—with my grandmother and my grandfather, off and on, on a quarter of an acre to which we owned one-eighth mineral rights. Mineral rights were very important in our part of Texas even though oil fields of any size were many miles to the north. My grandfather was very proud of getting any mineral rights at all and being only a mile and a half from the edge of Gilead, a town of 7,500 people at the time.

We lived there until the end of the summer my grandfather died, when my mother and I left to join my father in Sumatra, where he had taken employment with another oil company.

That summer the nights were full of sheet lightning and coppery stillness but no rain. It was too hot to sleep except for a few hours toward morning, and we were all restless and irritable. Even my grandmother. My mother would go into town to play bridge with women whose houses had what in those days they called "refriger-

© 1993 by Suzanne Jones.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ated air." My grandmother would play canasta with me or read the Bible, and my grandfather would drink gin and sit on the back porch and smoke. When he was there.

Often he was gone. Off on benders, three or four days at a time usually. Sometimes longer. He had been a jeweler, a gentleman rancher, a policeman, and now he was a drunk.

It was only a few years before the summer he died that I even thought of death. It crept into my mind like a cat from shadows. I remember the exact moment: I was sitting drowsily on my grandmother's lap on the front porch of a rooming house in Wichita Falls before Mother and I were to leave for Arabia. I had just started grade school. Nestled against the softness of my grandmother's body as she rocked, I felt it slide about my ankles, spring, and scatter sleep with the fear that when we left her, she would die. I knew she was old, and old people died.

Trying to stop my tears, my mother told me then that death was a natural thing, like the trees losing their leaves, dying in the fall, and in the spring, just as the trees leafed out and were reborn, so would we be. I think she was pleased with what she told me, but I was not much comforted. We weren't like the trees. For things of flesh and bone and blood, death was clearly a final fall.

The winter before my grandfather died we moved to the place in the country, which my grandparents had bought with my father's money, the place with one-eighth mineral rights of which my grandfather was so proud. That spring it rained so hard that it flooded parts of the low pastureland in the woods behind us and drove field rats by the hundreds up to our place, onto higher ground. Twice a day my grandmother would take the dogs and a baseball bat and go out to kill rats. "The dogs only play with them," she would say scornfully.

The rats had long yellow teeth and looked in death like small, sad beavers. She killed rats twice a day that spring until the waters went down and what few rats were left got away.

The previous fall we had come back from Arabia, and I had the happiest day of my whole life. My mother and I had been staying with my grandparents in Tyler. I had trouble breathing, especially at night. My mother, to indulge me, used to take me once a week to a livery stable that was not far from our rooming house. The stable had a fair amount of rolling, open land which was enclosed by white rail fences, just like in *Black Beauty*. I joined several other children there once a week, where we were supposed to learn to ride. After

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an old man with a limp walked us around a corral, we were allowed to take the horses out in the fields. The best horse in the whole stable was named Silver, a buckskin mare with a swayed back and a big belly who would run any time you asked her to.

When my father joined us in Tyler, I begged him for a horse. They had promised me one in Arabia when I had been so sick: when we got back to Texas, I was to have a horse. I pleaded, whined, and in general behaved like the ten-year-old child I was, as my father drove my mother and me across Texas to see the place near Gilead: a little shotgun house with an outdoor privy on a quarter acre of land. (My mother soon had a real bathroom added to the house.)

When we got there, Silver was saddled and bridled and waiting for me. For my birthday. It was, as I said, the happiest day of my life.

My father left for Sumatra, and my mother and I settled into our house until we could join him at the end of the following summer. My grandparents were to look after the place and the horse while we were overseas.

It should have been the best of times. My father was gone so often and so long that I did not miss him. After school there were endless woods to ride through, and in that more innocent time, even a young child was allowed to ride alone for hours. I was thrown, kicked, bitten, stepped on, run away with, and had the usual tricks practiced on me by what had been a "child's horse," though Silver was a full-size horse, not a pony. And she was not especially mean or vindictive. I loved her with a passion that is perhaps given only that freely in childhood.

It wasn't the best of times only because of my grandfather's presence. He would make me go and cut the switch he would use on my legs. If I didn't cut a large enough switch, or one to his liking, he would send me back to the scruffy hedge that someone had planted along one side of the property. My grandmother would sometimes cry.

As unkind and violent a man as he was, I don't recall ever seeing him kill anything. He wouldn't even watch my grandmother wring the neck of the chicken Sunday mornings before church. I watched, fascinated, as the headless creature would beat its way about the yard, stringing blood in little drops which dampened the dust the way my grandmother used to sprinkle the clothes she ironed.

It never occurred to me that my grandfather wouldn't always be there, like the stickers that pricked my bare feet or the summer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nights that were so hot they murdered sleep. There was no talk of divorce in those days. The only personal remark I ever heard my grandmother make about her husband was at the kitchen table after supper one evening when he was off on one of his lengthier binges. He had been gone for over a week. My mother was smoking and complaining about the dryness of her skin, and my grandmother said softly, "Fred had skin just like a baby's."

Though her words seemed to belong to the past, I was outraged that she could say anything good about him. He beat her, too, but with a belt mostly. Usually he was too drunk to do any real damage.

When that rainy spring gave way to summer, I would curry Silver, combing out the white winter hair, until her coat glowed as gold as that of a palomino. The blacksmith trimmed her hooves and cropped her thick black mane for the heat. At the root of her mane and tail, the hairs were white, silvery. She looked as good as she could look. She looked wonderful.

My grandfather would sit on the porch and drink gin and smoke and watch me while I worked on Silver. Then I would saddle up and ride away from there as fast as I could.

In memory I confuse his face, shadowed by the hat he always wore, with that of an old man who used to come around for food every few weeks. If my mother was home, she always made sure the old man got something to eat. Sometimes out of my grandmother's hearing she would say that he reminded her of my grandfather. She said that when she would be driving along a country road and see an old man in a felt hat, she used to worry that it might be her father. "*Your* father's not like that," she'd say to me, as though that were somehow to her credit. The times were hard and there were a number of men walking the roads.

Whenever the old tramp was around they made me come inside. He was just a dirty, sad old man. Still, my grandmother said it wouldn't be proper for me to sit with him while he ate. He didn't come around much when my grandfather was home. My grandfather said he'd had to run him off more than once.

The days that last summer had weight to them. As they passed, they pressed down on one another and on us, the time growing heavier and heavier as we came closer to when my mother and I were due to leave Texas. My grandmother rocked and prayed late into the hot, still nights. Prayed to be saved. Prayed to endure. She was afraid of losing her mind. Her own mother had had several "spells," as they called them when she was a girl, and they haunted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her. She read her Bible and grieved over our leaving with a desperation that I then could not understand. We might leave, but we always came back.

But with each day, that summer began to feel different from other summers. I began to be afraid that when we left, we might not be coming back, as my grandmother feared. That everything would end. A final summer, like a final fall.

Yet the night it happened was no different from many others, full of sheet lightning, dry and very hot. My mother had gone into town to play bridge, as she often did until the night became cooler. My grandfather had come home from a long weekend more battered than ever. Angrier. As if he too sensed the ending of things, and it made him more bitter and more reckless. More brutal. Around midnight, Silver began to scream and trot restlessly about the paddock.

I awoke on sticky sheets and heard my grandfather raise his voice, thick with sleep or drink, "Goddamn horse!"

My grandmother's answering murmur was muffled and indistinct, like the creek at high water. After a few minutes I heard the creak of their bed and my grandmother's light footsteps through the back of the house, out through the kitchen. Silver continued to trot restlessly, wheeling and pacing the fence near the house. I heard the screen door slap shut.

To get out the kitchen door at the back of the house, I'd have to go through their bedroom. I put on sneakers for the stickers and slipped out of the front door, clad only in my short pajamas. I went around the side of the house to the back fence where I could see my grandmother looking into the dark of the paddock. Overhead, ragged clouds were driven by a hot wind across a bony half-moon, but there was enough light to see her tall thin figure in her nightgown. She shook her head and went back into the house, silently closing the door. She hadn't seen me.

"Shhh," I cried softly, but I could see the whites of Silver's eyes, the sweat dark on her gold coat. She had been spooked by something around the hen house. A coyote, maybe. A snake. Something. She continued to move noisily from side to side along the fence.

I can't explain now the certainty of knowing as a child how fragile and ephemeral a condition happiness was, and how very vulnerable it was. To the envious. To the desperate. To those without hope.

Behind me I could hear my grandfather's angry voice. I opened the gate and went cautiously into the paddock. Silver wouldn't come

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to me, but continued to wheel restlessly and punctuate her turns with short, frightened snorts. I jumped and tried to grab hold of her mane, but my fingers slipped through the short, cropped hair. The light came on in the kitchen, and I turned to see my grandfather push my grandmother aside and come off the porch and through the gate, the baseball bat in his hands.

I hurled myself at him, screaming, "No!" He must have been startled to see me, rushing at him out of the dark. He put up an arm and knocked me aside. He staggered forward, cursing, and swung the bat at Silver. I heard the wet thump as it struck the meat of her shoulder, and her squeal of pain. I was on him in a moment, tearing, screaming, and we staggered about, me clawing and clinging frantically to his back. We fell, and as I rolled away from him, my forehead struck the foot of the stall. My ears were ringing, and I couldn't see, but I heard a horrible scream and soft thuds and grunts which grew fainter and fainter.

The water in the kitchen sink was pink. My grandmother's nightgown was soaking there. The good knife lay bloody on the dishtowel to the left side of the sink. I picked up the knife and rolled it in the towel and carefully wiped the counter clean. I went out the kitchen door through the paddock and slipped through the fence into the dark woods, which were shocked and still. The wind had stopped. Behind me I could hear Silver moving slowly and painfully and shaking her head.

I didn't go very far, just down to the bank of the creek where it was muddy and easy to dig. There I buried the knife in the dishtowel. Then I washed the mud off my hands and went back to the house.

My mother had come home from bridge and was sitting with the doctor in the yellow light of the kitchen.

My grandmother lay on her bed in a clean nightgown with her hands crossed over her chest—as though she were already dead. I sat on the edge of the bed for a while until her sobbing had been replaced by soft snores.

They asked me what happened.

I told them we had heard the horse acting up, and my grandfather had taken the baseball bat and gone to see what was wrong. I heard a cry, and my grandmother and I went out back and found my grandfather lying in his own blood. I saw someone running away. It might have been a tramp.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sheriff came, a large, round man in a khaki uniform. He sat at our kitchen table drinking coffee and pretending to be friendly. But he still wore his hat. The leather of his gun belt creaked as he breathed.

"Your horse is hopping. What happened to her?"

"She hit a fence," I said. I was afraid to say more.

"And what happened to you?" He looked pointedly at the bruise on my forehead. "Hit the same fence?"

I nodded.

The man sighed and took off his hat. Outside the night air had become cool, the crickets were silent, but it was still hot in the kitchen. The house held the heat.

"I've never known old Bill to carry a knife."

"I've seen him with one," I said. "Plenty of times."

"Really?"

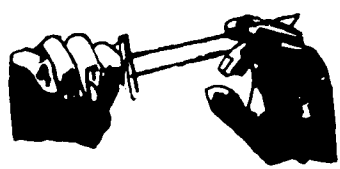
His disbelief did not invite a response.

"Plenty of times," I repeated.

The sheriff came back a few times more, talked to my mother. My grandmother never spoke again. Not really. When we went to Sumatra, my mother put her in a home in Gilead. It wasn't a nursing home as much as it was a place where people went to die. Whose families didn't want them. By then I don't think it mattered.

We put Silver out on my Aunt Jessie's place. When we came back from Sumatra two years later, I don't think Silver knew me. I scarcely knew her. She was just a horse. An old horse. We moved to Houston shortly after coming back to the States. We didn't have any room there for a horse and left her behind.

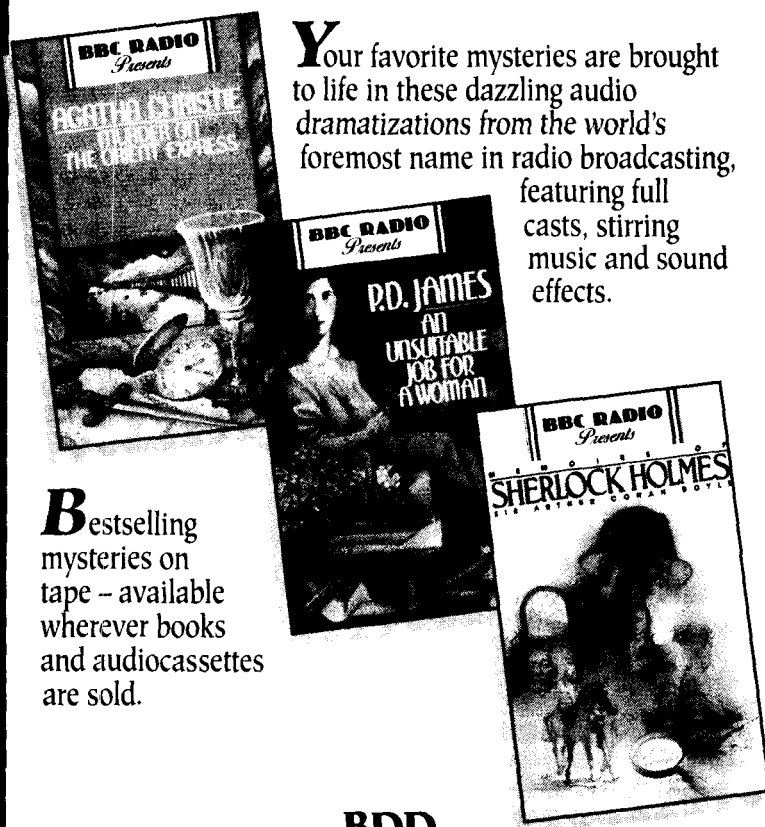
My mother never asked what became of the good knife. I have thought of it from time to time over the years, rusting in the earth, more durable than things of the flesh, less durable than things of the heart.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# MURDER

## NEVER SOUNDED SO GOOD...




Your favorite mysteries are brought to life in these dazzling audio dramatizations from the world's foremost name in radio broadcasting, featuring full casts, stirring music and sound effects.

Bestselling mysteries on tape – available wherever books and audiocassettes are sold.

**BDD**

BANTAM DOUBLEDAY DELL AUDIO PUBLISHING

AUDIOBOOKS – A WHOLE NEW WAY OF BEING ENTERTAINED!


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# DETECTIVERSE

## *LOUD MOUF MARY*

*by KATHERINE H. BROOKS*

I use to have a noisy wife,
her name wuz Mary Ellen,
Who kep me fum a pleasured life
by hollerin' an yellin'.
I figgered when I had my share
I'd ready up the cellar.
She ast me whut I done down there.
I sed I wooden tell 'er.

An then she started out on me
wif all the wicked in 'er,
While I was checkin' up to see
the fixins fer my dinner.
I betcha prawbly cooden gess
whut happen to Ole Mary!
I hitter wif a bacon press
an drugger down to berry.

I made alreddy wif a pick
a hole inside a wall so
I stufft it up wif mortar, brick,
an Mary Ellen also.
An when I heered a dreffle sound
a comin' thoo the floorin',
I worrit sum afore I found
my dawg had took to snorin'.

I mussen ack ascairt, or hide.
She'd like to git me, but
They's jus her lids is open wide—
her mouf's cemented shut.
She gutter lern to be more wise
an lovin-er to men,
An THINK a wile—afore she tries
to yell at ME again!

*© 1993 by Katherine H. Brooks.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** **short story by**

**BARBARA OWENS**

*Barbara Owens's new short fiction is a traditional mystery complete with clues and detection, and a terrific twist to boot . . .*

# FOOTPRINTS

***by BARBARA OWENS***

Colby Wright was there when Eddie Ray and his boy found her. That meant it was all over town before you could blink. Colby had a big mouth and not much sense behind it, so it was no use the cops telling him to keep his lip buttoned. Colby didn't have a button on that lip.

He was in my uncle's café before they took her body away, and everyone sat there with their breakfasts getting cold while they heard every gory detail. He'd gone out early, Colby said, hunting for aluminum cans in the park. We all knew he did that. Old Colby had been living off the state for years, and we were used to seeing him scrounging around the dump and along roadsides for anything that might bring him an extra buck or two.

While he was resting, having a smoke, he said, he heard a yell down by the creek. When he got there Eddie Ray was leaning over something on the ground and his little boy was crying. There she was, Colby told us, and you could see he relished it. Bonnie Reardon, all muddy and bloody and dead.

"Caved her head in with a rock," Colby said, spraying spit. "Didn't look to me like she even put up a fight. Took her by surprise, I'll wager, poor little thing. Her eyes was wide open, and I'll tell you, folks, you wouldn't believe the look in 'em. She was about scared out of her skin when she passed."

I'd heard enough. I turned around and started for the kitchen. Uncle John was standing in the doorway. He gave me a serious look.

*© 1993 by Barbara Owens.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You okay, Todd?"

"You hear all that Colby said?"

Uncle John sighed. "I heard. Don't want to believe it, but I heard. That girl a friend of yours, Toddie?"

"Well, not a real friend. But she's in my class at school."

He shook his head. "Terrible thing. I guess your dad's got his hands full right about now."

I hadn't even thought about that. My father, Big Joe Harriman, was Uncle John's brother and the best cop on the force. He'd probably be the one in charge of this.

Uncle John patted my arm. "But you can bet Joe'll find whoever did it. Look, you go on home if you want to."

I was tempted, but it didn't seem the best thing for me to do. "No, thanks. I'll be okay."

The café was emptying in a hurry. Uncle John looked out over it and sighed again. "Better clear those tables then. Once the shock wears off, we'll be full up—people spreading the word."

All the rest of that day we kept getting dabs of information, some outright and some just overheard. At first the story was that Bonnie had been raped, but when the doc came in at noon for his usual longhorn cheese on rye, he said that wasn't so. Someone told Uncle John that Bonnie's mother collapsed when she got the news. With her husband dead, Bonnie was all she had; they'd had to give her something to calm her down.

Everybody had an idea about who might have done it, and Del Baker's name came up the most. He and Bonnie had been going together for two years, off and on. Del had been kicked out of school that year, and he drove a truck when he wasn't getting into trouble. Everyone at school knew that he slapped Bonnie around when he felt like it. Nobody had a very high regard for him, and that included me.

Then the same old rumors about Bonnie and Mr. Crandall, the history teacher, came up. And several men swore that Bonnie hung around the Tiptoe Tap out on the highway some weekends, showing off for the flyboys from the base over in Springfield.

Nobody had seen or heard from Eddie Ray. He was holed up at home. But Colby was around and all over. Now he was saying that Bonnie had skin and hair under her fingernails, and that he'd seen a man's footprint in the mud beside the creek. We heard all kinds of things that day. About the only two everyone agreed on was that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bonnie had been the prettiest girl in school and that she was a little wild.

Dad and Lowell Braddock finally came in late in the afternoon. Big Joe eased himself onto a stool at the counter and gave me a tired grin.

"Stinking black coffee, son, and two pieces of Mary Beth's banana cream pie."

He took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair. Both he and Lowell looked sticky with sweat.

"Didn't see you when I left this morning, Toddie," Dad said. "John letting you keep banker's hours?"

Joe Harriman was the kind of man who made people feel better just by being in the room. Big and soft-spoken, he didn't look like he had a lot of brains, but plenty of guys sitting in jail cells had been fooled by that sleepy face. I didn't remember a day in my life that I wasn't glad to be his son, and I hoped to be just like him. Everyone knew I intended to join the force after college, and no one was prouder of it than he was.

I set the pie and coffee on the counter. "I got in pretty late," I told him. "Summer vacation, you know."

He nodded, remembering how it was. Uncle John came out of the kitchen and leaned on the counter beside me.

"I suppose you got the case, Joe."

Dad nodded. "We got it," Lowell said around a mouthful of pie. "Lucky us."

Uncle John said, "I've been trying to remember the last murder we had in town. Been a long time."

"When Les Jewett shot his wife," Dad said. "But we've never had as mean a one as this."

"You got anything at all to go on?"

"Won't know for sure until we flush out Del Baker," Lowell said. Lowell was a young guy, smart and good-looking in his uniform. He practically worshiped my dad. "Seems ole Del has left town." He snorted. "Must've had important business somewhere. Can't find anyone who knows where he is."

Uncle John gave a soft whistle. "Then it sure sounds like he's the one you're looking for."

"Well, we know he and Bonnie had a fight last night," Lowell said. "Loud and public. He smacked her a few times, then they went off together. Last time anyone saw either of them."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dad shifted on his stool. "Lowell," he said. "You're starting to sound like Colby. Button it, okay?"

Lowell grinned, but he buttoned it.

"Colby says there was a footprint in the mud," I said. I really wanted to hear about that.

Dad shook his head at me. "Since when did you pay attention to anything Colby said? We won't know for a while just what we've got. And I couldn't tell you anyway, Todd, you know that."

"Say," Lowell asked me, "you ever notice if Bonnie wore any jewelry? Most girls do, and there wasn't a thing on her. I'm wondering if somebody didn't take it off her before we got there. Colby, maybe. That old boy would do anything for a dollar."

"I never paid much attention," I said. "I think she might've had an ankle bracelet, but I'm not sure."

"Don't tell that around." Dad grinned at Lowell. "Carleen will have a fit if she finds out Todd's been checking out Bonnie Reardon's legs."

Lowell laughed when I turned red. Then they were on their feet again, setting caps back on their heads.

"Tell your mom I don't know when I'll be home tonight," Dad said. "And if I don't see you, you get home early. Make it to work on time tomorrow, understand? Don't want you taking advantage of John here just because he's family."

"Yes, sir," I said. And when he started to walk away I remembered to add, "Good luck."

Carleen called and wanted to get together after I got off work, but I was in no mood to hear any more talk about Bonnie's murder, so I went home. After supper I borrowed Mom's car and went out to buy myself new sneakers. I got cheaper ones this time. Now that I'd turned seventeen, Dad said it was time I started learning how to manage my money. When I drove by the park I couldn't help thinking about Bonnie lying down by the creek in the dark. Her mom would probably never get over it. And now Dad was out there somewhere, on the trail. I got home early, just like he told me to, and I fell asleep hoping he'd find Del Baker in a hurry.

Two days later Del was found and in jail. Dad and Lowell had tracked him to a buddy's fishing cabin. We heard Del put up a little fight, but not much. He was swearing he didn't do it, but somebody

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said he had scratches on his face and skinned knuckles, so nobody was doubting that Dad had his man.

Connor Hadley, who owned the hardware store, said to me, "Your dad's quite a man, Todd. He leaves mighty big footprints. You think you can fill them?"

I didn't much care for his tone, but I grinned at him anyway. "I'll sure give it a try, Mr. Hadley," I said.

Somebody heard Del was trying to tough it out, threatening what he would do if they didn't turn him loose. Uncle John just smiled at that.

"That boy doesn't know tough till he goes up against Joe Harriman," he said. "He'll be hollerin' for his mama before Joe's through with him."

"If they got Del's footprints, he's a goner," I said. "You hear anything more about that?"

"Somebody told me they took plaster casts," Uncle John said. "But I believe he's a goner anyway, don't you? I mean, who else could it be?"

Dad was home for supper that night, looking very relieved.

"I'm gonna get a good sleep tonight, that's for sure," he said.

Mom gave him a squeeze. "Everybody knew you'd do it," she said. She looked almost as happy as he did.

After we ate, he and I sat out on the front porch. It was a quiet night—felt like the whole town had just heaved a big sigh and relaxed.

"Del's already eighteen," I said finally. "That means he'll be tried as an adult, doesn't it?"

"Sure does." Dad smoked a few minutes in silence. "I can't get Bonnie's mother out of my head. Must not be anything worse than having a child taken away. I'd guess it leaves a hole inside that never fills up."

"Yeah," I said.

"I'll tell you something, Todd," he went on after a minute. "Remember this when you're on the force if you don't remember anything else. If Del ever admits what he did, he'll have a reason for it. They've always got a reason. Makes no sense to anyone else, but it's crystal clear to them. You or me could never understand why someone could do a terrible thing like that. That's what makes it so tough to figure them out."

"Well," I said, "Del's no good to begin with. I've heard he hit Bonnie before."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah, I heard that, too. From almost everyone I talked to, as a matter of fact."

"And Bonnie had a smart mouth. Maybe if she talked back to him—or laughed, made fun of him, you know—he just got so mad he did it before he knew what was happening. He could even be sorry about it now, but he's too scared to say so."

Dad nodded. "Well, I aim to find out. I'll tell you something else to remember. No matter how hard they try, they always screw up, leave something loose that points to them. A cop's job is to recognize it when he sees it. Sometimes brains will find it, sometimes it's plain luck, but it's there, it's always there."

"Like the footprint Colby saw," I said, hoping he'd tell me about that.

Instead, he stood up. "Can't talk about the case, son," he said. "But we'll get what we need, you count on it. Just have to put the pieces together." He yawned. "Going to bed now. 'Night."

" 'Night."

I sat there for a while by myself, feeling good. Del could keep on saying he didn't do it till he went cross-eyed, but he didn't stand a chance with Joe Harriman after him. Not a chance.

But another day went by without Del confessing. The mood in town began to turn mean. People wanted Del Baker taken care of and the cops couldn't hold him much longer just on suspicion. If they didn't nail him soon, they'd have to let him go. Some of what I heard began to sound like vigilante talk.

When Dad and Lowell came in for coffee, I told them what was going on. Dad didn't look concerned.

"Can't help how folks feel," he said, helping himself to another piece of pie. "They hired us to do the job right and that's the way we're doing it."

"Some guys from school were in earlier," I told him. "They said Del has a new girl over in Dubo. He was wanting to break up with Bonnie but she was giving him a hard time about it. That's what the fight was over the night it happened."

"Yeah, we know," Lowell said. "We've started leaning on him a little harder."

Dad nodded. "It's time. He's beginning to look shaky. I figure we can break him down soon."

Carleen and I went driving around that night. It was hot in town but out in the country, where she lived, you could feel a breeze. All

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carleen wanted to talk about was Bonnie and Del.

"He was crazy for wanting to break up with her," she said. "You'd never find anyone better than Bonnie. Even as pretty and popular as she was, all the girls liked her."

"Yeah, the guys, too," I said.

She poked me. "Except you, right?"

"Well, sure, except me."

"Of course she could mouth off if she got mad, but that was just Bonnie. I never did think Del was good enough for her."

"I never did either."

She leaned close to me. "You think he really did it, Todd?"

"Don't you?"

"Yeah." She shivered. "Boy, it's gonna be a cold day before I get up the nerve to go in that park again after dark."

All that talk just depressed us, so I took her home early. On the gravel road back to town my headlights picked up someone walking along the road. I slowed down. It was Colby Wright, a big sack slung over his shoulder. He grinned and waved when he recognized me. He was just shuffling along by himself, a pair of big floppy shoes sticking out below his skinny old legs.

Lowell came into the café by himself the next morning. He said Dad was with Del—they thought he was close to confessing.

"He's talking about the fight now," he told Uncle John. "Admits he hit her, maybe harder than he meant to." Lowell's mouth twisted. "Man, he got that right. She had bruises all over her arms and belly. I'd like to get that boy off by himself somewhere. We'd see just how tough he is."

My gut rolled a little when he talked about bruises. Bonnie had always been so pretty.

Just minutes after Lowell left, sirens started screaming somewhere outside. No one could see what was happening, so several cars peeled out from in front of the café to find out.

Uncle John went over to the front window. "That's police, not fire," he said over his shoulder. "Wonder what's going on."

We didn't have to wait long. The cars were back in a few minutes, spewing gravel. They'd followed the cops out to the dump. Colby Wright was there, dead. He'd been set on fire.

"Couldn't hardly tell it was human," we were told. "Just a big black crispy thing."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eddie Ray was in the café that day. He was still looking a little spooked, and now he turned white. "What's going on around here?" he said to no one in particular.

Even Uncle John looked pale. "Who'd do that to Colby? Poor old man couldn't fight back—probably never weighed more than a hundred pounds."

That news put the town into a real tailspin. Del Baker couldn't have done it—he was in jail. Several men left to go home and get their guns—no telling what was loose in town. Nobody could think of a single reason to kill Colby Wright.

"Except out of meanness," Uncle John said finally. "Just sheer damn meanness."

Dad was late getting home that night, but I waited up on the front porch for him. When he finally got there he sat down on the railing beside my feet. His shirt was wrinkled and sweaty—I could tell he'd had a hard day.

"Didn't expect to find you home, Toddie," he said. "Glad you are. Folks are acting nutty out there." He sighed. "Things are getting bad, son. I don't know what we're going to do now."

"I've been thinking about it," I told him. "You know how Colby always prowled around at night. You think he might've seen or heard something that would prove Del killed Bonnie? If Del found out about it he could've sent someone after Colby. Del runs with some pretty weird guys."

Dad stood up. "I'll tell you, Todd, I've been living with this all day. That was a terrible sight out at the dump today. I just don't want to talk about it anymore right now. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay." It seemed to me he looked a little older when he stepped into the light from the front door.

I didn't have to work at the café the next day, but there wasn't much to do in town to keep my mind off what was happening. Not many people out—everyone was staying home scared. I tried calling Carleen, but she was taking a nap. Her mother said the whole family had trouble sleeping the night before, but that she was confident my dad would find out who was doing these awful things. My friend Mike told me his dad heard from someone that Doc Powell said Colby's head was bashed in before he was burned. Just like Bonnie. Now some people were beginning to wonder if Del really had killed her.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I finally went home and mowed the yard before Dad got on me about it. I didn't see him that day. He must have gotten home really late.

A few of the regulars were back in the café the next morning. Uncle John wasn't feeling well, so I was manning the counter. Everyone wanted to know if I knew any more than they did, but I had to tell them no.

"It makes sense to me, though," I said, "that Colby knew something and Del had somebody get rid of him before he told. You know Colby and his mouth."

Several heads nodded. "Makes sense to me, too," someone said. "You got Big Joe's brains, Todd. You'll make a first-rate cop."

Remarks like that always made me feel good. And I felt even better when I heard what I'd said repeated later. "Yeah, looks like Colby knew something about Bonnie Reardon's murder and Del had him whacked for it." Before long it would be taken for fact.

By suppertime Uncle John was feeling so bad that he went home. Most customers had cleared out when the sun started going down, so it wasn't hard for me to handle things out front by myself. Finally we had so little business that Aunt Mary Beth cleaned up the kitchen and went home, too.

"Close up for me, Toddie," she said when she left. "Nobody's out tonight—too scared. I'm feeling spooked myself. Just want to get home and lock all the doors."

"Hope Uncle John's better tomorrow," I said.

She gave me a kiss on the cheek. "You be careful going home, you hear? Isn't *this something*? Lived here all my life and I've never been scared before."

I locked the door, put out the CLOSED sign, and started sweeping up. I was thinking so hard that I didn't even hear a car pull up out front. When someone tapped on the door, I jumped. It was Dad, looking at me through the glass.

I was grinning when I opened the door. "You're in luck," I told him. "I haven't thrown out the coffee yet. It's pretty thick, but I don't guess you'll care about that."

Dad came in slowly, like he was so tired it was hard for him to put one foot in front of the other. I went for the coffee and set a cup of it on the counter. When I looked across at him he was still standing just inside the door.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You want this or not?" I was trying to make him smile. It hurt to see him look so worn down. "Might throw in a piece of pie if you're up to it."

For a minute he didn't say anything. Then he took a deep breath and straightened his shoulders.

"I figured it out, Todd," he said real soft. It sounded like it hurt him to get the words out. "Finally figured it out."

The patrol car was sitting out front with someone in it. I could see Dad's and my reflections in the plate-glass window—him on one side of the counter, me on the other. All of a sudden I felt cold.

"I guess I knew you would." My voice sounded like it was coming from far away. When he didn't say anything, I said, "Lowell coming in?"

"Not unless he has to," Dad said. "Does he have to, Toddie?"

That was my dad standing there, Big Joe Harriman. What could I do? "No."

Neither of us said anything for a full minute. My legs began to shake and there wasn't a trace of spit in my mouth.

"It was that footprint," I got out finally. "What you told me about something always left loose. The footprint was it."

Dad's face seemed to sag, to settle on his bones like someone was letting the air out of it.

"Well, that's where you're wrong," he said. "You got too hung up on that footprint. There never was one. Too many people had trampled around before we got there."

"But what—"

"But you thought there was one—that's why you went out and bought new shoes. I noticed them the other night on the porch, but it didn't sink in. That's what pointed the finger, Toddie, the shoes."

It was so quiet I could hear his gunbelt creak every time he drew a breath.

"I don't understand," I said. "I thought—"

"I never would've gotten you for Bonnie—not enough to go on. The shoes did it. What'd you do, take the pair you were wearing that night out to the dump?"

I had trouble swallowing past all the flannel in my throat. "Yeah."

"And Colby found them."

"Yeah."

"See, Colby was barefoot when we found him, Todd. Now why would he be messing around in the dump with no shoes on? Come to find out, he'd been showing them off around town, bragging be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cause they were almost new. Had something written on the side of one. He got a kick out of it. Soon as I heard, I remembered that writing."

I couldn't run and I couldn't hide. This was my dad. I couldn't do anything. "CAT," I got out in a whisper. "Carleen wrote it on there. Stands for 'Carleen and Todd.' "

It was awful to see his face falling apart. He still didn't move, though. "Tell me how you got him."

"I drove by him on the road after I took Carleen home. He was wearing my shoes, Dad! I knew sooner or later someone would recognize them. It made me so mad that I pulled over, smacked him on the head, and drove him out to the dump. Swear to God, I only meant to burn the shoes at first, but then—I don't know—anyway, pretty soon Colby was burning, too."

Dad blinked several times, but he still stood straight as a soldier. Only his voice sounded like he was choking a little.

"And why Bonnie? Good God, what had she ever done to you?"

I didn't want to have to talk about Bonnie. I never even wanted to think about it again. But Dad was waiting. He wanted to know.

"I was cutting through the park on my way home that night and I heard her crying down by the creek. She and Del had had a fight and she was beat up. I couldn't take it. It made me so—I never told anyone, but I've been crazy about Bonnie Reardon since I was in grade school. I just wanted to help her, Dad, and she seemed to want me to at first. She told me about Del having another girl. She said she just couldn't live without him. I tried to talk sense to her. I told her Del was no good and she deserved someone better. She let me put my arm around her and she cried on my shoulder. I said I'd take care of her, that I'd always wanted to—"

I stopped. I couldn't stand the way he was looking at me. But he didn't say anything. He wanted it all.

"That's when she laughed." The flannel in my throat was so thick it was strangling me. "Laughed—like I was some kind of geek. She said Del was a real man, so why should she settle for me. She said she could get him back, she knew she could, so why didn't I just get the hell away and leave her alone. The next—the next thing I knew I was hitting her. I don't even remember picking up the rock. That's all. That's how it happened."

Dad's fists knotted at his sides. "And you told me about it. That night on the porch, when you were describing why Del might have done it, you were telling me what *you* did."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He looked like he was trying to understand.

"It was terrible, Dad. I was sorry the minute it was over. Bonnie just made me so mad when she wouldn't listen. You *know* I was talking sense. Then, on the way home, I realized that I'd screwed up. What if this meant that I couldn't be a cop? Del Baker's a loser to begin with, but I'm not like that. I'm good, I can help people, there was a *reason* why I—"

Dad jerked like he'd been hit, and I remembered him telling me that bad guys always have a reason. They never see what they did that was so wrong. Maybe he was thinking that about me now.

"You understand?" I asked him.

He didn't look like Dad anymore. He looked like a sick old man, something like I'd been imagining Bonnie's mom would look like with that emptiness inside that would never fill up.

"How in God's name did you manage to go back to work the next day?" he asked. "Both times! How could you look anyone in the eye? How could you talk to *me* about it?"

"I thought it would seem funny if I didn't," I admitted. "Besides, I wanted to know what was happening."

"And you were willing to let Del go to prison for it, weren't you?" he asked real soft. "You kept trying to point the finger at him."

"Well, yeah. I didn't want my chances ruined to be a cop."

He just looked at me. "Oh my God," he said.

"Honest, Dad, I didn't mean to do it. Can't you see it was a kind of accident? I'll never do it again, I promise."

He didn't answer me.

"Will you help me, Dad? What do you want me to do?"

Finally, he moved. He looked over his shoulder at Lowell outside in the patrol car, and when his head came back around his eyes were wet.

"I'll tell you what I want, Toddie," he said. "You come with me. We'll go down to the station and you turn yourself in. It has to be that way, son. Come on. Don't make me call Lowell in."

"You sure, Dad?"

His voice shook a little, but he looked me right in the eye. "I'm sure."

I tried to read his expression, to see if he really understood. "I still want to be a cop," I said.

"I know you do. Come on."

I did what he asked. I walked to the front door of the café. Lowell was out of the car and standing beside it. He didn't look at me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I felt nervous when we walked out, but I tried not to show it because I wanted Joe Harriman to be proud of his son. Then he put his arm around my shoulders and I stopped worrying. I even gave him a little grin. I knew things were going to be all right after all. Dad wouldn't let anything happen to me.

## SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERY CROSSWORD

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | S | K | E | D | ■ | C | H | A | D | ■ | S | U | M | P |
| L | O | I | R | E | ■ | L | A | N | E | ■ | U | S | E | R |
| I | N | T | R | A | M | U | R | A | L | ■ | E | U | R | O |
| B | I | T | ■ | D | E | E | D | ■ | I | N | G | R | E | S |
| I | C | Y | ■ | B | A | S | E | ■ | C | O | R | P | S | E |
| ■ | ■ | ■ | P | E | N | ■ | S | C | A | L | A | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| A | G | O | R | A | ■ | E | T | A | T | ■ | F | L | E | E |
| M | E | R | I | T | E | D | ■ | T | E | E | T | E | R | S |
| S | L | A | V | ■ | V | I | B | O | ■ | V | O | T | E | S |
| ■ | ■ | ■ | A | D | I | E | U | ■ | T | I | N | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| C | O | P | T | I | C | ■ | R | E | A | D | ■ | J | A | G |
| O | R | I | E | N | T | ■ | G | Y | R | E | ■ | E | P | A |
| L | I | N | E | ■ | O | R | L | E | A | N | I | A | N | S |
| O | B | E | Y | ■ | R | O | A | R | ■ | C | O | N | E | S |
| R | I | S | E | ■ | S | I | R | S | ■ | E | S | S | A | Y |

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLUE: IT WILL

# TANTALIZE AND CHALLENGE

YOU EVERY MONTH

ANSWER:

Each issue is packed with Crossword Puzzles from easy to challenger; Variety Puzzles such as Cross Sums, Anacrostics, Kriss Krosses and much more!

## DELL CROSSWORD PUZZLES

Subscribe today and receive 24 issues for only $29.97 or 12 issues for $15.97

SEND YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:

DELL MAGAZINES • P.O. BOX 5152
HARLAN, IA 51593

OR CALL TOLL FREE
1-800-888-6232

Please allow 6–8 weeks for your first issue. Outside U.S. and Poss. add $3.00 per year. U.S. funds only.

M7SA-7


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

**MICHAEL Z. LEWIN**

EQMM *is pleased to offer this month a story that has already found its way into print in both the U.K. and Sweden. As is characteristic of Mr. Lewin's work, "Students of Disaster" is worked around a strikingly original premise . . .*

# STUDENTS OF DISASTER

## *by MICHAEL Z. LEWIN*

1.

The separation of a man from his wife happens over a long period of time. Slowly too comes the ability to find the words, in voice or mind, which truly sum up the grounds growing between them.

Tim Bluffton was married twelve years before he faced the body of mood which meant, unambiguously, that he and Barbara were drifting apart. The crystallising seed had to do with their summer holiday, which each year before the Blufftons had spent at home, Tim building and mending things, Barbara reading about crimes and disasters, factual and fictional.

But in their twelfth summer Tim wanted to go camping. Get out before they were too old, pack the bags, see the country. Barbara took a deep breath and drew the line. Tim spent his holiday relaying the drains while Barbara read volumes one and two of *One Thousand True Crimes*.

Two and a half feet down and seventeen feet along Tim was struck by the first burst of cold bright light. "I am a *participator,*" he thought, "and Barbara is a *spectator.*" Simple words, but they covered countless situations from which Tim and Barbara had evolved increasing hostility with decreasing ceremony. It had been inherent in their relationship from the beginning, this dichotomy. Tim the doer, Barbara the watcher. Even while they were courting. One hot

© *1993 by Michael Z. Lewin.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night while Barbara spectated, Tim had done her. They should have known.

That night, when he'd finished the drains, Tim took the book from Barbara's hands. "There's no point in moaning and fighting for the rest of our lives. We only live once and we're still young enough to do something about us."

"Good idea," Barbara said acidly. "If you hate living with me so much, then leave. Larry Hartford left Brenda last spring and Brenda says it's like having two hundred pounds off her chest, she's so much happier."

But there was the rub. Tim didn't want to leave. He'd done so much in the house in twelve years, built things, mended things, made the house his by putting himself in it. A small thing to sacrifice for some, perhaps. But not for Tim the idea of leaving *his* house to Barbara, letting it rust and rot while she sat reading thrillers. Tim could put up with anything rather than that.

Anything but having a problem which he understood without trying to do something about it.

"Look, our fighting all the time can't be fun for you either," he told Barbara. "Why don't we admit we have problems and go to a marriage guidance counsellor. At least we'd be trying to fix things instead of just sitting around and waiting for life to get worse."

"You go, if you've got so many problems," Barbara said. To be fair, she was studying the details of the Moors murders, a far more compelling tale of tragedy and woe than anything she could relate to Tim Bluffton.

2.

The marriage guidance counsellor was a man. At first the fact comforted Tim. But then he felt naked, alone before this peer. He had made the appointment and invited Barbara to come with him. But she stayed at home, curled up with the latest book on John Kennedy's assassination.

"Marriage," said Mr. Mauzy, the counsellor, "is a two-way street. Give and take. Sharing. To get from marriage, you have to give. Now tell me about your wife, tell me about yourself. What does she like? What do you like? What did you like about each other when you were first keeping company? Tell me about yourselves, yourself, I mean."

"It was so long ago," Tim said dimly. And it was—half a chronological life and almost all of a conscious one. "I don't remember much of what I was like as a child. Young man."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was an apprentice engineer then. Good at anything with his hands, and not so bad with his head.

"I like doing things," Tim said. "It kills me to sit around and watch television or just talk about nothing. It makes me nervous and uncomfortable."

"And perhaps irritable," suggested Mr. Mauzy. "Whenever you are kept from 'doing' something, do you perhaps become irritable and argumentative? Or stamp out of the house?"

"Why yes, I suppose I do."

"We often see this sort of thing with couples who no longer expect children. There is an examination of what they want to do with the rest of their lives. You've told me about yourself, Mr. Bluffton. Now tell me about Mrs. Bluffton. What does she enjoy? Where does she get her pleasures?"

"She reads a lot."

"I see. And what sort of things does she read?"

"About crimes mostly."

"Thrillers. I see."

"Not just fiction. She studies real crimes. And disasters. She'll spend hours reading about disasters and listening to them on the radio and watching news reports. You can't tear her away."

"I see. And what do you think about this interest?"

"I think it's bloody morbid and disgusting. She seems to be more interested in people dead than she is in people alive." And he did think so; curious, he'd never formed the thought before. Nobody ever asked him what he thought about it before.

"Mmmm," said Mr. Mauzy. "Do you really think it's as bad as all that? A lot of people have the same hobby, as it were. Surely one of the things about thrillers is that they share the participation in disaster. We all have some interest in the kinds of difficulty that can beset humankind. I think an interest in disaster and crime is a reasonable sort of interest, kept within bounds. Don't you, really now?"

"I never read thrillers," Tim said.

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Mauzy, "it remains a fact that studying human disasters is a serious interest of your wife's and our job, talking today, is not to try to change your wife in her absence—for that is clearly impossible—but to try to find some way of coping, of going about life, which will enable the two of you to share the rest of your lives. If not as the most perfect of companions, then at least civilly. Isn't that what we are after?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But . . . " Tim began. He didn't finish the thought that came to him.

3.

As Tim sat in his car in the clinic's car park he nodded to himself with the wonder of his realisation. A simple fact. He didn't want to spend the rest of his life with Barbara. She was a negation of life to him. Everything he wanted to do, she scorned. Like the camping. Even when what he wanted was patently in the common interest, she never more than tolerated his projects. Slaving over fitted cupboards and kitchen surfaces. Gadgets, gardening, repairs. Improvements. Even when they were clearly in her own interest, she would stay silent, or niggle about wood shavings or the fact that if a job took two tools, when one was in use the other had to be left lying around. "She should have thanked me, loved me for all that," Tim thought. "My God, what a negative cow!"

Tim didn't want to live with her as a "civil" companion for the rest of his life. And what he realised in his car was that he would have to do something about it. He would. She wouldn't *do* anything. It wasn't her style. Though she would be happier if she left him to go to . . . to somewhere like . . . like Detroit or Tokyo or the Middle East, where there would be disasters and destruction and killing galore. Or to a big city where the library resources were greater than even a devoted student like Barbara Bluffton could strain. But she would never make things better for them. She would never *do* anything. For the rest of *his* life.

4.

When he got home from his meeting with the marriage guidance counsellor, Barbara looked up from her book and asked, "How was your doctor? Did he tell you you were crazy?"

Tim hung up his coat and then gently put Barbara's feet off the settee and onto the floor. He sat next to her and took one of her hands in his. "He said that I must try," Tim said, "to be more interested in your life and your interests. I haven't appreciated fully how hard life is for a woman in this society. I must try to find some way to involve myself in your life more than I have before. After all, dearest, we're only young yet. We have a lot of life to spend together."

"What?" Barbara wondered.

Tim smiled sweetly.

"I don't understand," Barbara said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

5.

From the evening of Tim's return from the marriage guidance counsellor, the pattern of life at the Bluffton's changed. Granted, Barbara, when not gossiping with her neighbours and friends, read her books on Dr. Crippin and the DC 10 crash over Paris. And Tim at work was the same old Tim to his mates. But at home Tim too read. Working slowly into the books Barbara finished, forcing himself to read and, gradually, to find an interest, if not the gut involvement Barbara felt.

"That poor little Maria Caldwell," Tim would say now, and Barbara couldn't fault him. She harboured suspicions, but the first few times she dismissed Tim as not really being interested, he exposed her by offering a tidbit of information or interpretation which had slipped through her intricate net. And he made obvious mistakes at first too, and she couldn't resist correcting them—thereby involving herself in his participation in her interest.

"He's a different man," Barbara said to Brenda Hartford when she ran into her at the laundrette one day. "All of a sudden he's reading, showing an interest in life instead of making things and fixing bloody things all day and all night."

"I've got a lot of things need fixing since Larry left," Brenda said wistfully, wondering what she could offer Tim in return for his efforts on her household goods. "If he's run out of things to do around your place."

"I can't imagine it will last," Barbara said, "but it is nice to have someone around the house to talk to for a change."

6.

The crunch came two months later when the Nypro Chemical Plant exploded in Flixborough. The news came through late in the afternoon and Barbara, feeling girlish again, could hardly wait until Tim got home.

"Have you heard—" she began, but she could tell by the light in his eyes that he had.

"Isn't it awful!" he exulted. "Do you know yet how many injuries there have been?"

"No, but they're afraid of another explosion— Tim, what's wrong?"

"I was just wondering," he said shyly.

"What?" she asked, suspicious. He was acting just like he always did when, in the old days, he was going to ask her to do something with him. Oh God, she thought. And things were going so nicely. I suppose it couldn't last forever.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Never mind," he said, knowing what her reactions were, would be, to what he wanted to suggest. It had been a long time since he suggested they do something. You'd have thought she'd give him a little credit. But perhaps it was too early to harvest any of what he had sown.

Maybe I'm wrong, she thought. "Go on, Tim. What were you going to say?"

"I just wondered if maybe you might like to drive up to look at the site, where it happened?"

"To Lincolnshire!"

"If we left now, we could sleep on the way, be there by morning. Or if we felt like it, drive straight through and maybe see it still burning or glowing while it was dark."

"But . . . " she began, torn. And stopped.

"I just thought it might be nice to do something together." There it was. The crunch. Make or break.

It made. Actually to see the big disaster area herself. "What about work?"

"I can fix that."

And he did. They went off to Lincolnshire and spent two whole days watching the disaster operation.

"Oh Tim," Barbara said as they left for home. "That was wonderful. You see so much more than ever you can on television. It's so much bigger, more meaningful to be there yourself. It really makes you feel your humanity, your mortality. That you're a person."

For Barbara it seemed like the dawn of a new era.

7.

"So I said to him," Barbara told her neighbour Flora Tipton over coffee one morning, " 'If I'd known you were interested, I would have just adored to go see the Summerland fire on the Isle of Man.' And he said, 'Let's go now, see the site,' and I said, 'Why not?' so we're going up to the Isle of Man this weekend. We've decided not to take any holiday right in a lump at all this year, but to save it in case we need it. You know, depending on what comes up."

"You're so lucky," said Flora Tipton feelingly. "Tim is such a wonderful husband to you. I can't get my Norris to do anything, not anything at all. He just sits around and looks at the box and I go bloody bonkers."

"Well," Barbara began, and hesitated because she'd never put the thought into words before. "In a good marriage, you have to share

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your interests. Have you tried a marriage guidance counsellor?"

"Good heavens no!" said Flora.

"You should try it. It did wonders for us."

"Did—was the counsellor, I mean, did he ask embarrassing questions?"

"Well," said Barbara, "I didn't actually go myself. But Tim went, just once, and it's been wonderful ever since."

"That puts it out for a start," said Flora. "Norris wouldn't go anywhere. He'd be afraid of missing *It's a Knockout* or a party political broadcast."

Barbara smiled contentedly.

8.

The contentment continued unabated, indeed grew, through visits to a train derailment, two fog-initiated motorway accordion pileups, three fires, two murder homes, a large pig farm devastated by swine vesicular disease, thirteen assorted vehicular accidents with nine fatalities, a flood, a pop festival, a National Front march, a powerplant where there had been a leak of nuclear material, and a visit to the scene of the Yorkshire Dales coach crash.

It was a full and busy life. Rich with giggles and tears and frissons, fully enjoyed.

After eight months the Blufftons decided to join a common interest society, the League of Students of Human and Natural Disaster, to broaden the scope of their activities. Through the league they received newsletters and material prepared on special subjects, particularly foreign catastrophes. And they went on group outings. The first was to Belfast to study bombing patterns and techniques for treatment of bombing victims. Then they spent a social weekend with a congenial party following the Jack the Ripper trail in London.

The period of contentment covered thirteen calendar months.

But one morning while Barbara was studying her Poisoner's Map of England and Wales, she heard the car in the drive.

She stood up quickly, felt the urgency. And she was right.

Tim rushed in the door. "Get your things," he said sharply. "Emergency. Plane crash."

She could tell from the way he spoke that it was a big one. "God!" Barbara said. "How awful!" And she ran to get a ready-packed overnight bag she kept at the bottom of her wardrobe.

Tim explained what he knew as he drove. "A new Quadraster. It was only a few minutes out of Manchester when it just blew up in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

midair. Fully loaded. A holiday flight. There were 187 people on board, including a lot of women and children."

"Where did it come down?"

"In North Wales. I bought the ordinance survey map on my way home, but you know about these things. The bodies may be scattered for miles."

"Oooo, how terrible," Barbara said. She turned on the radio and made herself comfortable in the seat.

9.

They got to the base camp of the Emergency Operations Centre about an hour before sunset and sensed immediately the familiar chaos common to major disasters. Ambulances and official vehicles prowled restlessly as if waiting for something positive to do.

"What chances are there of survivors?" Barbara asked one of the rescue officers as he walked from one headquarters tent to another. An experienced official, he thought she was a reporter, though she didn't say it. It was an aura Barbara cultivated carefully. She had thought about writing about her techniques for the league bulletin.

"From what we know so far, I wouldn't want to raise anybody's hopes."

"Have you found any bodies yet?" Tim asked.

"None," said the official. "Off the record, just bits and pieces scattered all the hell around the forest. Not a hope."

"About where do you expect to find the bulk of the wreckage?" Tim asked, and produced his map and a pen.

The official paused. The last thing he wanted was the critical area located in the press. The way the gawkers would clog the narrow forest roads would be appalling. But he felt obliged to cooperate, so he marked a spot on Tim's map about a mile from where he knew the wreck to be. "About there. Now excuse me, please."

"Of course," they said in unison and went back to their car.

"No survivors," said Tim.

"How awful," Barbara said.

"What do you think?"

"We can stay around here," Barbara said.

"I think we might as well have a go. We might be able to help," Tim said.

"It will be dark soon."

"Come on," Tim said, with the faintest trace of impatience. "It would be nerve-wracking to sit around here and not be able to do something."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

10.

They got to the area designated by the official within half an hour. They pulled to the side of the road to decide where to go. An emergency vehicle overtook them and drove straight ahead.

"Look," said Barbara. "Let's go see what he's found."

But Tim had spotted a service road cut through the trees ahead of them on the right.

"But it's the wrong direction," Barbara complained.

"I think we ought to go up there," Tim said. "No one else will. Just think, if someone did land in something soft and is still alive, how terrible it would be if no one found them in time."

It was an irrefutable argument, but Barbara was basically annoyed. After they had driven for a quarter of a mile she said, "There's nothing for us here. I don't know why you had to come down this track."

Tim stopped the car. "It was just a chance," he said. "Look, let's get out and walk around for a quarter of an hour. If we don't come up with anything, we'll probably be best off back at the Operations Centre. After dark almost everybody will be coming back anyway. Maybe we can get into the food tent and hear what they're talking about."

But Barbara was irritated. "We should have followed the truck that overtook us."

"Well, I'm part of this trip too," said Tim with a resoluteness unexercised for many months. "I'm getting out to have a look around."

"Well, I'm staying here. Woods are full of *things* and I hate them. That's why I didn't want to go camping and I'm not walking around out there now."

Tim hesitated. Uncertain whether to fight or let her stay. He took a chance; there was time. He let her stay and walked around as if he were looking for airplane wreckage. And to his disgust, in a small hollow, he found some. He picked up a thick heavy branch which had been knocked off its tree by a piece of torso sent from the sky. It was dead wood, short and heavy but not rotten. Just dead. Tim carried it back to the car.

"I've found part of a body," Tim said quietly.

"Oh God. How awful," Barbara said, all forgiven. She got out of the car and followed where Tim led.

"It's dark," she said as Tim pointed into the hollow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Down there."

Barbara peered, then said, "Oh, I see it. Isn't it terrible!"

With the big stick, Tim laid her to rest beside the piece of body.

11.

It took Tim an hour to disguise Barbara to look like wreckage and strip from her body articles which would directly identify her. Engraved wedding ring, watch, teeth. When he was satisfied, Tim drove home.

It was a long drive, and in the dark, but he didn't at all feel like falling asleep. He was wakeful and happy, and on a deserted stretch of motorway he pulled to the verge and victoriously threw the ordinance survey map and Barbara's last bits out the window. The first of many exultant disposings. Or, rather, the second.

He slept when he got home. And when he woke midday, he went to the police station and reported his wife's absence.

"We went on a trip yesterday and got back in the early hours. But when I got up this morning, she was gone."

"Oh, I daresay she just went shopping and didn't want to disturb you," said the desk sergeant, who was more kindly disposed than his hardening years should have left him. "She's probably at home wondering where you are right now."

"It just isn't like her, to go off and do something," Tim said truly.

12.

When Barbara didn't come home for several days, there was some local interest. Not only from the police. It was an unexpected happening with upsetting overtones, the kind of thing people are interested in.

"They were so happy," Flora Tipton said to Brenda Hartford. "At least this last year or so."

"Yes," said Brenda. "Barbara did get happy all of a sudden. Now I wonder if she could have—you know—have found someone."

"You know I never thought of that," Flora said. "You don't think . . . Oh, but it makes sense. The little minx. And to think she suggested that I send my Norris off to the marriage guidance counsellor. To think, and all that time . . ."

"And then they were taking all those trips. They never took those before."

"But they went away together," Flora said, now confused.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But what do we know about what they got up to while they were away? All we know is that they left together and they came back together."

"Do you think he knew? He helped her?"

"Some men will put up with almost anything to keep their wives. She said he was showing surprising interest in her hobbies."

"Oh, the poor man."

"And he's all alone," said Brenda, thinking how she'd felt when Larry had just left her.

"Oh, the poor man," reiterated Flora.

"And him so good with his hands. I wonder who's doing his cooking for him. I've got some leftover leek pie he can have."

"Oh, you are nice," said Flora, whose mind wasn't really up to certain kinds of intricacy.

For his part, Tim's mind was freed from intricacy. Eyes forward. Life to come. There were more than a year's worth of neglected repairs to get on with. Quite apart from the complete and precise expunging of everything around the house that had to do with his Barbara. Late and unlamented.

13.

Beside the M50, connecting North Wales with the rest of the world, a small, curious boy saw something green in the grass. Though he was supposed to be on his way to visit his grandmother, he went over to what he saw and found an open ordinance survey map, with a small circle drawn on it. "That's a mystery," he thought. "Gran will like this. Nothing Gran likes more than a good mystery."

He was pleased to have found something which might set his grandmother's active mind to thinking, for usually he just sat and listened to her tell of her great passion in life, stories of detection.

The small, curious boy was about to continue when a glint caught his eye. A ring. And then another glint.

He was running when he arrived at his Gran's and he called her name as he approached the door. Hearing him, she put down her copy of the bulletin of the League of Students of Human and Natural Disasters and came out to meet him. Quickly he showed her all the things he had found.

"That's funny," she intoned. "A real mystery." As her mind began to work on who she should write to, what she should do first, she put her arm around the small, curious boy and led him inside. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Solicitor Harry Devlin joined the roll of notable lawyer-sleuths with the publication of Martin Edwards's first novel* All the Lonely People *in 1991. That book brought Martin Edwards a nomination for the John Creasey Memorial Award, and he followed it up with two more novels starring solicitor Devlin. We present the detective here in his first short outing . . .*

# THE BOXER

## *by* MARTIN EDWARDS

"Hey man," said Sylvester Page, "you think I'd make a good detective?"

Harry Devlin stared at his client.

"Forget it," he said finally. "Mike Tyson would be more credible as a monk."

Sylvester laughed and Harry thought he could feel the whole of the office building shake. During his time in the boxing ring, Sylvester had been two hundred and forty pounds of muscle and sinew; his manager had trumpeted him as Liverpool's Black Giant. The three years since his last bout had not been kind to him. He was running to fat and poor enough to qualify for legal aid. Yet still the sight of his huge fist smacking against his thigh made Harry wince at the imagined pain.

"Listen," said Sylvester, "losin' a job can turn any man to crime. I'm under Monique's feet all day at home and it's drivin' her crazy. I wouldn't want to see the inside of Walton Jail again. So why don't I do the other thing? As a kid I always dreamed of being a private eye."

"Sam the Spade?"

Sylvester guffawed again. "Trouble is my business, man. You've got the idea. What d'you reckon?"

"What do you know about detective work?"

"Hey, I've been a security guard for the past two years. And being a detective is mostly—what do they call it?—surveillance, ain't it?"

*© 1993 by Martin Edwards.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harry rubbed his jaw. He could tell that, for all the banter, Sylvester was in earnest, and so he wanted to keep a straight face. Yet he found it impossible to visualise his client making discreet enquiries or shadowing a suspect without bringing traffic to a standstill. Sylvester was as subtle as a Scud missile and potentially as lethal. He was by no means stupid and had the sharp sense of humour that seems to be part of every Scouser's genetic code. Yet there was an innocence about him, and an unexpected air of vulnerability, that had always appealed to Harry. It would come as no surprise to learn that Sylvester still believed in Father Christmas; disillusioning him would be as cruel as telling a child the truths of life a moment too soon.

"I'll have a word with the local enquiry agencies if you like. In the meantime, let's get on with your claim for compensation."

"I want to sue them bastards who sacked me for every penny they've got!"

"You should get a few quid, anyway. The company says you're redundant, but it sounds like an unfair dismissal. Security's the one industry in Liverpool that is always on the up and up. Besides, they took on someone new to do your job the week after you were paid off. Let's see what the industrial tribunal makes of that, if we can't settle out of court."

Privately, he thought a deal certain. No one would relish confronting Sylvester in belligerent mood. His temper was awesome when roused. In the city people still remembered what he had done as a young man to the Scottish heavyweight who had incautiously larded his prefight press conference with a smattering of racist remarks. After three rounds, the Aberdeen Adonis looked more like a battered Bootle bag lady.

"This new director they brought in from down south kicked me out," Sylvester complained. "The foreman knew my story, but as soon as the other feller found out I'd done time, there was nothin' down for me."

Harry could understand it in a way. To employ a security guard with a criminal record seemed like a contradiction in terms. Yet any villain smarter than a slab of cement would think twice about making a move on a site where Sylvester was on patrol.

A cynic might add that Sylvester had the advantage of knowing how burglars think, but the charge that he had been involved in the clumsy and abortive raid on a bank in Derby Square had been dropped through lack of evidence. If Sylvester had been able to resist

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the temptation to lash out at a policeman who had poured scorn on his alibi, he would never have finished up in prison.

That attack had signalled the end of his career as a bruiser, both inside and out of the ring. He'd sworn in future to go straight and so far he'd kept his word. Harry hated the thought that unemployment might provoke him to break it.

"What will you do until you get fixed up?"

"Go shootin', maybe." Sylvester roared with merriment when he saw the alarm in his solicitor's eyes. "Nah, don't worry. See, my cousin Earl gave me one of his guns. He spends his spare time pottin' rabbits out Halewood way."

Harry had met Earl. He was a secondhand-car dealer and the obliging provider of Sylvester's alibi for the bank caper; he was said himself to have a season ticket for the Liverpool Crown Court. His excuse for owning guns was likely to be as genuine as a prostitute's smile.

"What about having another try at an ordinary job? Never mind this idea about becoming a private eye. You may well find something. People remember your name. . . ."

"Yeah, but they want an autograph, not to give me a paycheck. This is Liverpool, man. Jobs are as rare as Conservatives in Kirkby, you know that."

"Fair enough, but keep your ears open. Don't sit back and wait for the compensation to roll in. Roulette's a safer bet than relying on a tribunal case."

"Okay, okay. I know what you mean. I can't spend the rest of my life watching thrillers on TV. Monique calls me the Olympic Torch, 'cause I never go out. She keeps on at me to get off my butt and find somethin'."

His voice softened, as it always did, when he spoke about his wife. Harry had met her at their wedding eighteen months earlier. Monique was a beautiful honey-skinned girl and it was easy to understand Sylvester's devotion to her.

"Is she still working for Freddie Cork?"

"Nah. I wouldn't let any wife of mine work. That's for the man to do. The woman's job is to look after the home and him."

Harry let that one pass by. He wasn't brave enough to argue about sexual stereotyping with a man who could reduce him to blood, skin, and bone in a couple of minutes.

"She was a personal secretary, wasn't she?" he asked, choosing his words with care. "Perhaps to tide you over she could . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sylvester banged his fist on the desk between them. It was a gesture of emphasis rather than of anger, yet the crack of splintering wood made Harry shudder.

"No way. When I got the elbow, she offered to go back to Freddie, but I said no fear. She even mentioned he might be willing to offer me somethin'. I told her I wouldn't work for him again if it was the last job on earth. Not for that creep with his white suits and his Ray-Bans."

It was an apt description of a slick businessman who had made his fortune transporting wages from banks to factories in Merseyside's bandit country in the days before cashless pay became the norm. Now Cork ran a safe-deposit business in the city centre, looking after jewellery owned by plump matrons and cash that people had forgotten to record in their tax returns. Sylvester had driven security vans for him briefly; that was how the big man had first met Monique. But shortly afterwards he'd been arrested in connection with the bank robbery and Cork had seized the opportunity to sack him.

"Think about it. Good money's hard to come by."

Sylvester grinned. "You got it wrong. Easy to come by, hard to keep."

True enough in his case. He'd never made it to the top in boxing, no doubt due in part to the failings of his manager, who was the sort who would have told John Lennon to go back to art school, and recommended his clients to put their shirts on a hundred-to-one shot in the Grand National. But there was something missing in Sylvester's own makeup as well. He had the power and the skill, but what he lacked, Harry thought, was the killer instinct. There was a warmth about him which the best boxers did without. His naivete was as endearing as his willingness to use humour against himself. Those were not qualities Freddie Cork shared—but Cork was a rich man, a winner, and Sylvester no more than a fallen idol, overweight and out of work.

Rising to his feet, Harry said, "I'll send the papers in to the tribunal. Good luck down the mean streets."

Sylvester offered a huge paw, but Harry evaded it. After the last time they'd shaken hands, he had not been able to grip a ballpoint pen for a week.

When the boxer had gone, Harry ambled into Jim Crusoe's office. His partner was a fight fan and the two of them had once watched Sylvester do battle at the Silk House Sporting Club. The sight of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two men trying to knock hell out of each other for money had left Harry cold.

"Sylvester Page has been sacked. I've been advising on a tribunal claim. He sent you his regards."

"How is he?"

Harry shrugged. "Down but not out, same as in that scrap we saw at the Silk House. He's even talking of becoming a private detective."

Jim gazed at the heavens. "Lacking a bit in the little grey cells, isn't he?"

"I didn't want to discourage him," said Harry. A nostalgic smile spread across his face as he added, "Asking only workman's wages, he's gone looking for a job, but he's got no offers."

In response to his partner's puzzled stare, he explained sheepishly, "I was thinking of an old Simon and Garfunkel song about a boxer."

Jim shook his head in a parody of despair.

"Never mind *The Guinness Book of Hit Singles*. Get back to *Atkin's Court Forms* and make us a few quid."

One rainy day the following week, Harry met Sylvester coming out of a doorway in Brunswick Street. He glanced up at the sign above the front window of the building. It bore the legend WILLING HANDS.

"So you're still looking, then? Sorry I couldn't come up with anything for you in the gumshoe line."

Sylvester made as if to slap him playfully on the back, but Harry skipped out of range like a neurotic Gene Kelly.

"You told me to get off my butt. Well, that's what I done. Monique spotted this ad in the paper, she said it was worth givin' a go."

"Any joy?"

"Man, they tell me this job has my name on it. Great hours, even better money. And no sweat."

"Where can I apply?"

"Somehow I don't think you qualify, Harry."

"So what exactly are you going in for?"

A coy look flitted across Sylvester's face. "That'd be tellin'."

Harry's suspicions were aroused. While he found it hard to imagine Willing Hands advertising anything illegal in the press, little would surprise him about the branch boss, Edie Brailsford. He had once acted for her, in the days when she was manageress of an escort agency which had fallen foul of the police because of the eagerness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of its young ladies to keep their customers satisfied. To everyone's amazement, when her case came to court, she was found not guilty. Harry still wondered if she might have enjoyed a previous business acquaintance with one of the magistrates.

"Suit yourself," he said reluctantly. "I'll be in touch when I have news about your claim."

Sylvester turned up the collar of his raincoat in the manner of an outsize Columbo and headed into Drury Lane, leaving Harry to scan the recruitment agency's window. It was impossible not to admire the skill with which a handful of vacancy cards were arranged so as to give the impression that Liverpool was a hotbed of opportunity for the vocationally challenged.

"Harry, sweetheart! Looking for a Willing Girl?"

A middle-aged woman wearing a tight sweater and too much makeup had put her head round the door of the agency. The arching of her pencilled eyebrows gave her an expression of permanent innuendo.

"Hello, Edie. Matter of fact, I've just been talking to a client of yours. Sylvester Page."

"Isn't he a hunk?"

"He seems happy enough with the job you've found him. What is it, exactly?"

Edie Brailsford gave a mischievous smile. "Now that would be telling. You'll understand, sweetheart, as a fellow professional, that we have to observe strict client confidentiality. My good name depends upon it."

So far as Harry was concerned, Edie's good name was Loretta Labelle, the alias by which the escort agency's clients had known her, but he didn't press his questions. A vague idea was forming in his mind that he might not appreciate the answers.

Yet over the next few days, he often found himself wondering what Sylvester was up to, and his curiosity was given a further tweak the following Monday.

He had been over in Birkenhead interviewing a client and he'd taken the underground train rather than bothering to drive. When he arrived back at James Street station, he ignored the lift and chose to climb the long sloping ramp which led to the Water Street exit. It was a nod to keep-fit which would make him feel less guilty about having a couple of Mars bars instead of lunch.

He emerged panting into the open air and, hurrying across the road with his head down, he cannoned into a human Himalaya

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

standing on the edge of the pavement opposite the station entrance.

"Hey, are you okay?" asked Sylvester Page.

What little breath Harry had left had been knocked out of him and a few seconds passed before he was able to reply.

"I'll live, probably. God knows what it feels like to be hit by you when you really mean to hurt. Anyway, I thought you would have started work by now."

Sylvester beamed. "Started already, haven't I?"

He was wearing a baseball cap of the type once sported by the late Robert Maxwell and a lime-green shell suit too small for his enormous frame. It was the kind of outfit that caused Harry to suspect that Sylvester had learned to box in order to teach a lesson to all the other kids who mocked his taste in clothes.

"Don't tell me that is your working uniform."

"Nice, innit? Got style. Anyway, they let me choose my own gear. Perk of the job."

"Oh yes, the mysterious job. Are you going to tell me what it is?"

A broad grin spread across Sylvester's face. He raised a finger to his lips.

"Got to keep mum, haven't I? Can't talk about it at all. It's more than my job's worth. Know what I mean, Harry?"

Harry gave up and said goodbye. But as he walked up Water Street, a thought occurred to him. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that Sylvester had scarcely moved. The big man was peering into the window of a building society. It was difficult to believe that he had a genuine interest in premium share accounts and offshore tax investments. If the idea was not absurd, Harry would have said Sylvester was trying to fade into the scenery.

Harry crossed the road again. Buses tailing back from the traffic lights opposite the Liver Building blocked him from his client's view. He stopped outside the building which occupied the corner of Water Street and Drury Lane, opposite the accountant's office which Harry had once visited in search of the explanation of his wife's murder.

A short flight of stone steps led up to a huge metal door. Beside the door a discreet brass plate bore the legend Liverpool Safe Deposit Company.

For all the brightness of the sunshine, Harry felt a sudden chill. Might Sylvester be carrying out—to use his own word—surveillance on the premises of his former employer? And if so—what could be the reason for it?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When Harry reached his office a minute later, he found waiting for him a new client, a man in his mid-forties so squat and ugly he might have been designed by the architect of a sixties' housing estate. While he advised on how to sue the dating agency which had failed to find his client a woman desperate enough for marriage, Harry puzzled over the mystery of Sylvester's new job. As soon as he had dispatched the disappointed suitor, he dialled Sylvester's home number and drummed his fingers impatiently on the desk until at last a woman's voice answered.

"Monique, it's Harry Devlin here. Sorry to disturb you. I bumped into Sylvester half an hour ago, but I forgot to ask him for information about his new job. It may affect his unfair-dismissal claim, and his likely compensation."

"I don't know much about it," said Monique. She seemed to be choosing her words with care. "Shall I ask him to ring you?"

He wondered about the reason for her guarded tone. In the past he had always found her open and chatty. As a guest at their wedding, he remembered envying Sylvester his good fortune. But Monique was shrewd, too, and she knew he shared her husband's fondness for playing the detective. Instinctively he sensed she was anxious to keep something from him.

"Any idea when he's due in?"

"Let's see. It's two-fifteen now. Maybe around quarter to six."

"I'm glad he's fixed up," said Harry quickly. He could tell she was about to hang up. "But do you think he's happy in this new job?"

"Of course! It suits him perfectly."

Harry thought she was protesting too much. He determined to press further.

"Do you know who he's working for?"

"It's—it's all supposed to be hush-hush."

"Look, I'm on Sylvester's side, remember?"

"Well . . . he's been hired to do some detective work."

"Sylvester?"

Harry didn't pretend to hide his amazement.

"Yes—and why not?"

"Come on. I love him dearly, you're well aware of that. But we can be frank with each other." He swallowed. Never mind frankness, it was time to be bloody rude. "And the truth is, I wouldn't back him to find a needle in a sewing shop."

"You underestimate him," she said angrily. "I thought you were his friend."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was in too deep now to draw back.

"Monique, has he got mixed up with something shady?"

"I told you! He's taken a job as a private investigator. Now, I'm really busy and I'm surprised you seem to have time to waste instead of pushing on with Sylvester's case."

She slammed the phone down, leaving Harry alone with his speculations.

No one in their right mind, surely, would pay Sylvester to act the sleuth. All the local firms Harry had spoken to had dismissed out of hand the idea of offering the man a job. If they were looking for new recruits at all, they would find them in the ranks of ex-policemen, not former boxers with a criminal past.

Since the encounter in Water Street, an unwelcome suspicion had been loitering in Harry's mind like a grubby squatter to whom he could no longer deny house room. He groaned, and the noise attracted the attention of Jim Crusoe, who had been passing the door.

Looking in, Jim said, "What's eating you? Anyone would think you'd just been asked to serve a writ on a rottweiler."

"I'm bothered about Sylvester. I'm inclined to think old habits are dying hard."

He gave an account of his conversations with Sylvester and Monique. His partner listened intently.

"So what do you make of it?"

"One thing's for sure, Sylvester is no more a Poirot than Bertie Wooster was a Hell's Angel."

"What, then?"

"Twice now I've seen him in the vicinity of the place where he used to work, the Liverpool Safe Deposit Company. There's no love lost between him and Freddie Cork. He's been on the fringe of an armed robbery in the past. His cousin Earl must merit his own special floppy disk in the Police National Computer. He's in possession of a gun. And Monique appears to be covering for him."

"You don't suppose he's planning some sort of raid on the safe deposits?"

"You're more of a shamus than Sylvester will ever be. You got it in one."

"So what can you do? Tip off the police?"

"What kind of solicitor grasses on his own client? Especially a client who's an old pal and hasn't committed a crime?"

"Will you have a word with him, then?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No alternative, is there? I wonder if he's still hopping round outside that building society. It must dawn soon even on him that he sticks out there like snow in the Sahara."

He walked round to the place where he had last spoken to Sylvester. This time there was no sign of the big man on either side of the road. The way in to James Street railway station, he observed, was barred by a grille. Curious, he thought. At this time of day there was usually open access to the ramp.

He walked up to the grille and read the notice attached to it.

*Station closed this afternoon due to industrial action. Merseyrail apologises for any inconvenience caused.*

He turned to Drury Lane and bought an early edition of the local paper.

"What's happened at the station?" he asked the news vendor.

"Another of these lightning strikes," he was told. "No warning at all. One minute the trains were coming through. Next minute they stopped."

His next port of call was the Willing Hands agency. There he found Edie flirting with a job seeker young enough to be her son. Perhaps even, he thought ungallantly, her grandson.

"Sorry to interrupt, but I need to contact Sylvester Page. Sooner rather than later."

Edie frowned. The job seeker took the hint and sloped off.

"I told you, sweetheart, it's confidential. Professional ethics, you know."

"Look, I wouldn't persist if it wasn't important. Besides, you still owe me a favour after the Pretty Partners case. I've already worked out that this job of Sylvester's is a charade, but I'm hoping you'll be able to give me a clue to what is really going on."

Edie pursed her lips, but nonetheless she waved him into her private cubicle at the back of the open-plan office. Once inside she reached for a card index box from which she drew a paper oblong.

"Here."

Harry read the closely printed card with astonishment. A client had asked Willing Hands to find him a private detective. The candidate had to meet certain requirements. He or she must be free to take up the post at once, without having to give notice to a current employer. He or she must have experience of the security industry, be physically fit, and have proven skill in the art of self-defence. And he or she must have been born and bred within one mile of the Liver Building.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My client doesn't want much, does he?" asked Edie. "I never knew anyone so pernickety. Told me which local paper to advertise in and then insisted I interview the candidates myself. I had a set of sealed orders I was supposed to give to the right person. I said to my client, you'll be lucky, you'll never find anyone to fit this bill."

Harry gnawed at his fingernails. He was thinking furiously.

"Oh yes, very confident he was," continued Edie. "A fool and his money are soon parted, I thought. Yet lo and behold, who should turn up straightaway but your mate Sylvester. Miracles do happen after all, I said to myself."

"I don't think there was anything miraculous about it," said Harry slowly.

"What are you getting at?"

"Who was your client?"

Edie drew herself up. "Sorry, but I reckon I've repaid that favour. My integrity—"

Harry scribbled a name on the card and tossed it back to her.

"Am I right?"

She gaped at him. "Well, as a matter of fact—"

"Did you happen to see what was in the sealed orders?"

Edie twittered something about the glue on the envelope coming unstuck and the papers falling out. Harry interrupted in the middle of her self-justification.

"Did they say anything about keeping an eye on the Water Street entrance to Merseyrail between, say, specified hours of the afternoon?"

She shook her head in bafflement. "How do you know all this?"

"I read minds, Edie. Trouble is, I was dyslexic to begin with. Thanks for your help. Mind if I use your phone?"

He dialled a number but couldn't get through. The receiver had been taken off the hook.

Without another word, he left. Time was short, that he knew. Sylvester lived in the inner city; the best hope was that he had not gone straight home when the railways had closed down unexpectedly.

He hurried round the corner to where he parked his MG convertible and within a minute was heading down the Strand towards the block of flats where the Pages had their home. As he drove, he cursed himself for being no less naive than his client.

He pressed the accelerator, praying he would not be too late.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As he swung into a side road, a ten-storey tower loomed above him. He was still praying he would not be too late when he caught sight of something flying from a top-floor window. All he could see was a white blur in the air for a split second before it hit the ground.

He stamped on the brakes and pulled up thirty yards from the block. By the time he got there, people who had come running from the street were gathering around the broken body on the tarmac. Craning his neck to see beyond them, he caught a glimpse of naked flesh, tightly permed hair, and a pool of blood.

At first he thought his legs would give way beneath him. On the way here, he had clung to the hope that his guesswork might be wildly wrong, but the evidence that his worst fears had been well founded lay on the ground in front of him.

"Not a stitch on him," said a woman in curlers. Her voice was dazed, but fascinated.

"Call an ambulance," wheezed an asthmatic old man with a *Daily Mirror* tucked under his arm.

"Don't you mean the road sweeper?" asked a leather-jacketed youth with a sickly smirk.

His heart pounding, Harry forced himself to stumble towards the tall building. Whether he could salvage anything from the disaster now he doubted, but he knew he must try.

To his amazement, the lift was working and the car was at the ground floor, ready and waiting for him. It's a sign, he thought, there is still a chance.

As he pressed the button marked ten, he asked himself how long the affair had been going on. Anything to take his mind off that mess of death on the road outside.

For all he knew, the relationship between Monique Page and Freddie Cork was a recent thing. But even if it dated back to the time when she had worked for him, Sylvester's redundancy must have been unwelcome. With her man hanging around home all day, every day, Monique had little opportunity to misbehave.

The lovers needed Sylvester to get out of the house and they had to know how much time they could spend together, secure in the knowledge that they would not be disturbed. Concocting the job of Sylvester's dreams must have seemed like a perfect solution: it made everyone happy. The job description had been devised with Sylvester's personal curriculum vitae in mind. The details of the cock-and-bull story instructing him to watch for a mythical quarry didn't matter. The key point was that, from his office window, Cork could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

see that the cuckold had taken up the appointed position and would know that he was safe to slip out by a side door and speed over here to his lover's open arms.

But he had not counted on a snap rail strike and on Sylvester deciding that as there was no point in staying on duty, he might as well go home.

To be interrupted in a passionate embrace by a call from a nosy solicitor was bad luck; no wonder they had taken the phone off the hook. To be caught *in flagrante* by a hot-tempered husband with sledgehammer fists had, for Freddie Cork, been a fatal misfortune.

The lift reached its destination and he raced down the corridor. The Pages, he remembered, lived at the far end. But he was half a dozen strides from their front door when a single gunshot rang out. It was followed by a scream that Harry thought would never end.

For perhaps one whole minute he stood transfixed. Not for the first time in his life he was swamped by a sense of loss. The pain, he knew from past experience, would come later. For now there was nothing but a feeling of utter helplessness.

He trudged to the door of the Pages' flat. It was open and from the passageway he could see through into the living room.

Sylvester's corpse lay on the floor, directly below a cluster of photographs on the wall which showed him winning fights and having his arm raised aloft in triumph by midget referees. Harry gagged at the sight of the bloody remains of what had once been his client's head. Earl's gun lay where it had fallen on the carpet.

A couple of feet away, Monique crouched in a foetal ball, rocking backwards and forwards with her head in her hands. She had stopped screaming and was now making a keening sound. She was naked, as she must have been when her husband arrived home before he was due.

Sylvester had got it wrong, thought Harry. He'd wanted to be a Merseyside Marlowe and had finished up more like Moose Malloy.

He closed his eyes in a vain attempt to shut out the horror, but the ghastly sound of the wailing widow went on and on. In his misery he realised that he too had been mistaken. His client had not, after all, lacked the killer instinct.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*In 1992 a story featuring David Dean's detective patrolman Julian Hall placed in the top five in the voting for the* EQMM *Readers Award. The ideas for Hall's adventures are often sparked by incidents that occur while the author himself is in uniform. Mr. Dean is a sergeant with a resort-town police department. . . .*

# DON'T FEAR THE REAPER

**by DAVID DEAN**

Julian sat slumped in thought in the passenger seat of the patrol car, looking south down Island Drive. His partner, a summer officer, sat ramrod straight behind the wheel of the idling cruiser, his hands clenched in a death grip on the steering wheel.

Every summer, the Camelot Police Department augmented its small force with a dozen or so Class II officers drawn from criminal justice programs at various colleges. All the communities on the Jersey shore followed this pattern during the tourist season, when the populations of the islands would suddenly explode with do-or-die fun-seekers. The hordes would occupy their newly acquired kingdoms from Memorial Day until Labor Day, when the call of unseen forces would compel them to fold their tents and move on, leaving behind their stunned, but richer, subjects.

Julian's musings came to a halt as the event they had been waiting for began. He sat up a little straighter in order to witness the nightly ritual of bar closing and glanced over at his partner, who remained on alert, reminding him of a retriever waiting for a signal from his master. His gelled flattop nearly quivered in anticipation.

"Think there'll be a fight?" he asked, with a little more enthusiasm than Julian liked to hear.

"Um . . . could be. Possibly," Julian responded noncommittally.

Naturally, that was why they and several other cars were there. To forestall, as much as possible, the usual fights, vandalism, and the like, that tended to occur when several thousand drunk youths gathered together in one place. That place happened to be the Camelot Bar and Grill. A mammoth, rambling old hotel that occupied a

© 1993 by David Dean.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

city block and boasted three separate bars, a liquor store, and pool tables. The actual hotel, which had occupied the upper two stories, had been closed for many years now.

As they watched, the crowd began to pour out of the building, rushing through the now-open double doors that dotted the side of the structure and spilling onto the sidewalk and overflowing into the street. Many of them were drenched in sweat, their shirts plastered to their bones. Some seemed to be gasping for air, lifting their arms to the skies as if thankful for deliverance from the crush inside. Julian felt a drop of perspiration slowly working its way down his chest and tugged his protective vest away from his body to let some of the heat escape. It was quite warm for two in the morning.

He pointed out one young woman to his partner. She was on her hands and knees at the curb, puking up her paycheck. "Well, at least someone had a good time," Julian remarked.

The mob spread out to block half the traffic circle in front of the Camelot. Southbound cars were going in the wrong direction around the circle to avoid them. Northbound cars were taking evasive action to escape collision with the southbound rebels. One of the other patrol units began to ease its way into the milling crowd, slowly cutting a swath through them, forcing them to cross the street or to get back up on the sidewalk. Julian remained in place, ready as backup. He carefully scanned the crowd for signs of trouble, alert for the arching beer bottle that could turn this exodus into a melee.

"Where are they, do ya think?" he asked his younger partner.

"Who's that?" Franklin replied, a puzzled look on his seamless face.

"The piggyback couple." There was a pause while the young officer mulled this tidbit over.

"The piggyback couple?" he finally stammered. "Who's that?"

Julian was amused to see a furrow of concentration actually form a crease on his shiny young forehead.

"Franklin, I'm shocked at you. You're not aware of the piggyback couple?" Franklin looked worried now, knowing he was being set up. "Soon they will come out of that bar, as they come out of that bar every night. As they come out of every bar in this town every night. Nay, as they come out of every bar in every town in this state every night, sooner or later. And yet, you, a police officer, if only a Class II, know nothing of them. I'm disappointed in you, Franklin."

Franklin responded cautiously, "Oh yeah, right."

"Ah, here they are," Julian murmured.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As if on cue, the piggyback couple came jogging out into the night. A very drunk young man carrying an equally drunk young woman, squealing with delight, on his back. Julian chuckled. It never failed, no matter the bar. It was a phenomenon, peculiar to the summer perhaps, that cops witnessed with unfailing regularity. The couple made it to the corner before falling victim to gravity and the effects of alcohol. They disappeared, flailing, into some shrubbery.

"How'd you know that?" Franklin gasped.

Julian didn't answer, but spoke into the microphone of the car radio, "Eleven-oh-seven will take that call. We're eight blocks south of it." He turned to Franklin and said, "Turn us around and take us to Thirteenth. A caller heard screams in the vicinity."

Franklin executed a hard U-turn, cutting off an oncoming car and slamming Julian against the door.

"Jesus, Frank, take it easy. I'd like to get there alive."

"I didn't hear that call," Franklin said, almost under his breath.

Julian could hear the self-recrimination in his tone and offered some consolation. "Yeah, I know. You were too busy worrying about the piggyback couple. It'll all be in my report."

Franklin floored the gas pedal and they careened northward.

As they approached the area of Thirteenth Street, Julian had his young partner slow the squad car down to a crawl and kill the headlamps. "Keep your eyes open for anybody wandering around down here," he instructed. "And roll down your window and listen." He reached over and switched off the FM radio and at the same time informed dispatch that they were in the area and that nothing was showing. He heard Eleven-hundred tell dispatch that they were in the area also, cruising south on Island Drive. Julian could just make out their darkened car, creeping ghostlike along the curb several blocks away.

Julian looked around, noting the desolation of the neighborhood after the press of the bar crowd a mere quarter-mile away. No one seemed to be out, and there were few houses showing lights at this hour. They were crawling past the public-works yard, with its chain-link fence running the length of the block, when Julian switched on the alley light, throwing the various trucks, tractors, earthmovers, and surfrakes into sudden relief. There was no movement. No quarry was flushed from hiding. He switched off the light and told his partner to stop the car. They came to a halt underneath the water tower.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm gonna take a walk around. You go ahead, but stay close. If you stop anybody, call Eleven-hundred for backup. They'll be able to get to you quicker than I will on foot." Julian eased himself from the car and quietly clicked the door shut. He leaned back in the window and said, "Don't forget about me, okay?" and walked quickly into the shadows.

He waited for the patrol car to leave the area and listened. Still nothing. Just an increase in traffic due to bar break. He checked to make sure his portable was on low and began to ease along the perimeter of the fence, keeping in the shadows.

He followed the fence around the corner where the water tower stood and stopped. A ragged piece of black fabric fluttered weakly from the strands of barbed wire that topped the fence. He could just make out some lettering on the cloth. It appeared to be "ALLICA." He noted that the strands were pressed down onto the chain-link, and that section of the fence leaned out over the sidewalk as if crushed down by a great weight. Julian looked up and was struck square in the forehead by a drop of liquid. He gasped and stepped back, his hand going involuntarily to the spot. It came away glistening with water. The water tower was sweating in the warm night air. He peered up two hundred feet to where the vast squat tank rested on its enormous legs and became aware now of an occasional plop of water on the nearby sidewalk. He risked a look with his flashlight but saw nothing on the catwalk that girded the belly of the tower. He flicked off the light and the tower seemed to retreat, making him feel as if he were falling backwards or that the tower was in its final moments of balance prior to crashing to the earth in an asphalt-splitting explosion of water. He stepped back, stumbling, and forced himself to look down to counteract the effects of vertigo. His portable crackled into life, causing him to start.

"Eleven-oh-seven to Eleven-hundred, I'll be out with two subjects at Twelfth and First."

That was Franklin, and Julian began to walk quickly east on Thirteenth to back him up. As he reached the next corner, he heard Eleven-hundred sign out with his Class II and slowed. He could see the little gathering just a block north of him now on First. Three officers and a young couple.

Julian approached quietly from behind as the two Class II's let the full-timer, Shane McPherson, do the talking. Julian just listened as Shane did his thing. There was no one better in the department at this kind of encounter, in Julian's opinion. Even though he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overweight and nobody's idea of a recruiting poster cop, Julian had great respect for him. What he lacked in appearance, he more than made up for in quickness of wit.

Julian sidled around to have a quiet look at the subjects. They were younger than he thought, not more than nineteen from the looks of them. The female noticed him immediately, casting a sullen, guarded look in his direction. The male's attention was completely on Shane's massive presence, a stupified expression on his face. He was tall and thin, with a bad complexion and bangs that hung into his eyes that he kept nervously brushing away. Julian noted that his Blue Oyster Cult T-shirt was sticking to his starved-looking frame in several places. The girl seemed out of breath.

She caught him looking and Julian thought he saw a moment's alarm flash across her white, fleshy face. It was gone in an instant, replaced by an angry determination that glinted in her small green eyes. She swung back to Shane and launched into a low, forceful monologue, forcing Shane to focus his attention on her. The boyfriend was shunted aside, literally taking a step back.

Julian drew closer to catch what she was saying and observed her right hand disappear beneath her great thatch of orangy-red hair and grip her neck, massage it lightly, and drop again, nonchalantly, to her side. Ignoring Julian completely now, she stood with her short, plump body planted firmly in front of Shane and explained, in exasperated terms, that, yes, she and her boyfriend had been in the neighborhood a few minutes ago taking a walk, as if that were a crime, and may have had a little difference of opinion on a few things. No big deal! The hand crept up to her neck again. It happened, or didn't the cops know that? Now, could they get on with their lives without any more police interference?

Shane looked amused. The boyfriend looked smug, staring admiringly at the girl. Shane took the lead. "So, what are you sayin'? That you two had a fight and maybe you did a little screamin'? That's what the neighbors heard?"

She answered Shane, her voice dripping with contempt. "Yes, Officer, that's what I'm saying. Now, may we go?"

Shane plowed on, impervious. "So, why?"

"Why what, Officer?"

"Why the screamin'? He hurt ya, or what?"

She glanced over at her boyfriend and a tight little smile crept onto her face. "No, he didn't hurt me. No one hurts me. We're on a different plane than that."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I kinda figured that," Shane replied without missing a beat. "So, you had a fight, you did some screamin', you didn't get hurt, and here we are."

She visibly relaxed, the hand went back to the neck. "Yes, exactly."

Julian stepped forward. "So, what's wrong with your neck?"

She swung to face him, the hand quickly retracted. Fury contorted her already plain face into ugliness. "What?" she hissed.

Julian directed the beam of his flashlight to her neck, revealing a livid red line beginning at her jugular and vanishing beneath her mass of hair. It looked like a rope burn, but much narrower, and recent. The throat area was unmarred.

"How'd that happen, miss?"

There was a pause as she mastered herself. Julian could almost hear her thinking. "In a volleyball game," she began, her voice low and her eyes focused on the ground. "We were having a volleyball game at the house when someone's hand got caught in my necklace." Her eyes met his now. "It was an accident. Nothing to do with this. No concern of yours."

Julian glanced over at Shane. They understood each other. There was nothing for them here. They'd found their screamer and that would have to be that. If there had been violence between these two, there was nothing they could do with what they were getting. "You got some ID from them and a local address?" Julian asked, as he began to walk to the patrol car.

"Yeah, just waitin' on dispatch to verify their DL's," Shane called to his retreating back.

As they drove away, Julian looked back at the newly released couple. They were making their way down the sidewalk, their arms wrapped around each other as if for support. Their disparate gaits caused them to wobble as they walked, and they never looked back.

It wasn't until after four A.M. that Julian remembered the patch of black cloth at the water tower. The Class II's had all been released at four and he was now teamed up with Shane. The sun was just starting to lighten the eastern sky with a rosy hue.

He pulled up to the base of the tower and pointed it out to Shane. "This is what I thought was going on last night with the screamin'. I figured someone had tried to scale the fence to the tower and got cut." Julian opened the car door. "Let's take a look."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They ambled over to the damaged fencing and Shane pulled the fabric loose and studied it. "It's a torn shirt," he announced. Julian peered through the linkage into the tall, yellow grass beneath the tower. He spotted a brand-name sneaker lying on its side. Farther in, he could make out two large depressions in the grass, maybe some clothing. "Yo, Jules, I think there's some blood on this shirt."

A slight morning breeze swayed the foliage surrounding the depressions and Julian felt himself falling again, like last night. Sweat instantly coated his palms. He gripped the chain-links and turned to Shane. "There's two bodies in there," he said tightly. "I think one of them belongs to the shirt."

Within forty minutes of their summons, the scene was transformed from the breathless quiet of dawn to a place of controlled confusion and subdued chatter. Following standard operating procedure, Julian had had the dispatcher notify the detective on call, the chief, the prosecuter's office, and the M.E., and all had duly arrived in various stages of stupor. Even though the sun had risen well above the horizon, it was not yet five-thirty. The scene had been taped off, and another patrol car had taken over shooing away the morbidly curious, though at this time of the morning they consisted only of the occasional jogger or elderly dog-walker. Even coffee had been sent out for. The various officers and technicians stood in idle groups, having completed the photography, and waited for the medical examiner to finish her preliminary examination before they began to process the scene for physical evidence. Julian stood over the body of a young white male as the M.E. crouched beside it, making some notes. She clucked and hmmed.

She turned her head and looked up at him. "So, you and Shane found the bodies?"

"Yeah," Julian quietly replied. "There was a report of screams in the area around two A.M. We didn't find anything here, but I noticed the shirt. We came back for another look when it got light. We also found how they got in. The lock is missing off the maintenance gate. They fell?"

She had started writing again. "Looks that way, or jumped. Do you know either of them?"

Julian gazed down at the broken body of the boy. He lay on his back, one leg almost completely folded under his body. The remaining flap of shirt showed the letters MET and a garish print of a guitar-playing skeleton. The chest, exposed where the T-shirt had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been torn away, revealed numerous serrations made by the barbed wire and subsequent punctures from the top edge of the chain-link fence. He could see the purple-black line of lividity running lengthwise along the boy's back, where the blood had settled after his heart stopped beating. It left the rest of him dead-white. The face appeared too large and asymmetrical as a result of the shattered skull shifting under its fleshy cover. Julian thought of the boy's parents and suddenly, yearningly, of his own children, safe at home, dreaming in their tousled beds.

"Yeah, I know him. He lives, or did, a few blocks from here on First. He was seventeen. His name's Ryan Louper. The kids called him Loopy. I had him on a drug charge about two months ago and he'd agreed to supply me with some info on who's dealing LSD to the juvies around here. Acid's made a big comeback lately. I'd yet to hear from him."

The M.E. looked at Julian thoughtfully. "Think that has anything to do with this?"

"I thought you said they had fallen or jumped?" he shot back.

After a short pause, she replied, "Yeah, I did." She turned and walked a straight and careful line to the next body. Julian followed, placing his footsteps in hers. When he reached the girl, he almost retreated a step. In spite of the fact that she had missed the fence and had less obvious damage, the result of the unbroken impact had been devastating. She looked as if a giant had stepped on her and carefully ground her into the earth. Her eyes had almost distended from their sockets.

Julian looked away and said, dry-mouthed, "I don't know this one. I don't think I've ever seen her before."

The M.E. clucked and hmmed again. She began jotting on her notepad.

Julian cleared his throat and began again. "I don't think Ryan was the kind of kid that would kill himself. He knew the score. He knew that juvenile charges don't carry much weight. The worst he would have been facing was counseling or drug rehab, probably. If he didn't want to snitch on the dealers, he would have just said so. It was no big deal. In fact, he hadn't snitched on anybody and probably wasn't going to. He was just stringing us along, more than likely." He stopped, realizing how defensive he sounded. And felt. He had been warned about using juvenile informers, how volatile they could be.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Julian looked up to the tower catwalk and back to the sagging fencing that Ryan's body had struck. It wasn't far from the base of the tower, but would a simple slip and fall have taken him even that distance? And how did he explain the girl? How did she happen to fall also? He looked down at her broken body again and sighed. A silly, adolescent notion came to him. Maybe they were holding hands at the moment of the fall . . . or jump. It was then that he noticed her clenched fist, two slender pieces of leather, or rawhide, dangling from it.

"Doc, what's she holding there?"

The M.E. unhurriedly turned her attention to the corpse's right hand and carefully pried it open. Lying there was a cheap-looking silver cross. Julian squatted down to get a better look, resisting the impulse to pick it up. On closer inspection, he could see that it was a type of cross, but with a difference. The head of the cross ended in a loop. The leather thong was threaded through a small opening at the top of the loop and broken, ending in two pieces. It was obviously meant to be worn around the neck.

"That's what I think is called an ankh," the doctor murmured. "Egyptian, if I remember my history of religions classes correctly. I believe it symbolizes eternal life." Neither chose to comment on the irony.

It suddenly occurred to him how they could have both "fallen" at the same time. "Doc, do you think Ryan could have been wearing this? It would make sense that if she started to fall, that she would reach out to grab something. Maybe she grabbed this necklace and pulled Ryan over with her."

The doctor looked thoughtful. "That's a pretty theory, but I saw no abrasions on the neck of the male during prelim. Still, an autopsy will tell us more. You can let the others know that I'm done here." She stood and stretched as Julian made his way to the cluster of officers.

As Shane pulled away from the curb, Julian looked back at the technicians fanning out beneath the tower, the bodies once again hidden from view. Even in the light of day, the water tower now looked evil to him, like a great heathen idol, gloating over its sacrifices and its secrets. An involuntary shudder coursed through his tired body, and a flash of memory surfaced like a striking fish. A picture of a girl on a darkened street rubbing the back of her neck and wincing in pain.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Loupers were home, as Julian feared they would be. He imagined they had had another sleepless night, thanks to Ryan.

He had not wanted to pull this duty, but since it was technically his investigation and there was the identity of the girl to clear up, it fell to him. He had Shane stop just around the corner from the Louper's rented house. The father's pickup was still in the drive, and the mother was clearly visible at the kitchen table. She was still in her housecoat, staring angrily out the window. Julian looked at Shane. They had already discussed what they would do.

As soon as they stepped into view, Mrs. Louper rose from her chair and took several steps toward the door. Her face was set and grey, vestiges of fear showing in her darkened eyes. She stopped herself from rushing to the door. As they climbed the steps, they heard her call out her husband's name. He appeared abruptly behind her as she opened the door to their knock.

"Do you have him down at the station again?" she asked immediately.

Her husband's face was loose with exhaustion, frightened. He was seeing more clearly than she. He saw that this was different. If they had had Ryan at the station, they would have just called, wouldn't they? That's what they'd always done in the past. Just called.

Julian began, "Could we just come in for a moment? I think we all need to sit down."

A spark of fear and suspicion animated the woman's face and was quickly subdued. She folded her arms across her chest and remained blocking the door. "You've got him, don't you? Well, I hope you've put him in a cell this time! If he's going to keep fooling around with drugs that's what he deserves!"

Julian pictured Ryan's shattered body lying naked on a mortuary slab and wanted nothing more than to stop her from saying these things that she would have all of her life to regret. He continued on up the steps, forcing the woman to step aside, and entered the kitchen. "Ryan was with a young lady last night. Do you know who she was?"

The question threw them both off guard. He could see them visibly relax. Problems with a girl, this was something normal. Something they could understand. Julian felt cruel, delaying the blow he knew he must deliver, but if he waited they might not be in any condition to identify the dead girl. After all, she too probably had parents frantic with worry that she had not returned.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Louper spoke. "He went out with his girlfriend last night. She's from Bayshore Township." Bayshore was a down-at-the-heels town in the south of the county. Julian recalled that Ryan had run into some trouble down that way not too long ago. "He said they were going over to a friend's house to listen to some music. He promised me that it wasn't a party."

"Her name?" Julian asked.

"Becca . . . Rebecca Tournquist. Are they in some kind of trouble, Officer Hall?"

Julian ignored his question. "Could you describe her for me?"

Mrs. Louper answered. "She's seventeen, the same age as Ryan, has black, wavy hair just past her shoulders, and is kinda tiny . . . you know, petite. Is that what you needed to know?"

Julian faltered. That was the girl he had found. Now for the hard part. "Yes, Mrs. Louper, that's very helpful." He took a breath. "Now, I have some very hard news for you. Maybe we should sit?" No one moved. The Loupers, all color drained from their faces, remained immobile, waiting for the blow. "Ryan and Rebecca were killed last night in an accident." He stopped; he could feel his hands shaking and he placed them in his pockets. The woman began to sway, a low moan breaking from her ashen lips. Shane was quickly at her side, easing her into a chair. Suddenly Louper slammed his hand down on the tabletop, causing the dishes to jump and startling the officers.

"They didn't have a car, damn you!" he shouted. "It's still out front! They walked to where they were going!" he finished triumphantly, desperately.

"It was a fall, you see," Julian resumed quietly. "They apparently were on the water tower and fell." He refrained from mentioning any other possibility. "Mr. Louper, is there anyone you would like us to call? A priest or minister? If you like, we could get someone here to stay with you and your wife."

Louper, his hands still on the tabletop, supporting his full weight now, looked up. The hot tears were streaming from his eyes. "You're sure? You're sure it's Ryan?"

Julian just nodded. Mrs. Louper began to wail, a soft, keening sound. Her husband made no effort to go to her. Each was engulfed in their own grief and guilt. Julian heard someone clattering down the stairs from the second floor.

"Mom, Dad? What's wrong, what's happened?"

The little sister, Julian thought. I forgot about the little sister. Oh God.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Several hours later, Shane and Julian were back at the station, drained and exhausted. They had summoned a doctor, who had medicated the survivors, leaving them zombielike in their quiet house. No TV, no radio. Just silence.

Before they left, Julian had secured permission from Louper to search Ryan's room. He had explained that it was normal procedure in a case such as this. Louper had simply nodded yes. It was Shane who had discovered the sheets. There were three of them. Each had fifty hits of blotter acid on a sheet of notebook-sized paper that was expertly perforated into fifty tabs for easy detachment. Each tab contained the LSD in the likeness of a dancing bear surrounded by roses. Childlike images. No suicide notes.

A quick field test confirmed their suspicions, and Julian packaged a sheet for examination by the prosecutor's lab for a definitive analysis. The other two he set aside for latent fingerprints. He was anxious to know who else had handled these sheets besides Ryan. Tomorrow, he intended to rattle some cages.

Jacob Scotland was shooting hoops at the Rec Center when Julian found him the following evening—a small, thin boy of sixteen, with a clear, milky complexion and a guileless, baby face. Julian noted that despite his size he held his own against the larger boys on the court. Since the age of fourteen, Jacob had successfully broken into a dozen or more homes, using a second-floor technique that required a good deal of dexterity and wiry strength. He had been caught twice already and showed little inclination to reform. In fact, his M.O. had recently resurfaced in a string of B&E's in the lagoons.

This was the person that Ryan and Becca had told the Loupers they were going to visit on the night of their deaths. Julian waited for halftime and signaled Jacob over. He approached in his usual carefree manner, wiping himself down with a dirty-looking towel, as if being summoned by a cop during a basketball game was commonplace. His angelic face beamed.

"Officer Hall, how ya doin'?" he began.

Julian didn't smile back. He was in no mood for the usual adolescent banter. He had already decided to cut right to the chase.

"You know about Ryan and his girlfriend?"

Jacob's cherubic features clouded briefly. "Yeah, it's all over town. Bummer, huh?" The smile broke through the clouds again. Irrepressible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Julian resisted the impulse to strangle this kid. "Yeah, Jacob, it's a bummer. I can see that you're real tore up about your buddy."

"Yo, man, Ry and Becca followed their own path. That's nothin' to do with me. They had free will."

Julian was caught off guard by Jacob's record-jacket philosophy. "So, what are you saying, Jacob? That they walked out of your place, climbed the tower, held hands, and jumped? Did you watch all of this, Jacob?"

Alarm rippled across Jacob's face. "No, man! I wasn't there! They didn't even come to my house that night!"

Julian already knew that, having checked with Jacob's parents. He bluffed. "There's no law against suicide, Jacob, but there is one for assisting. If I find out you were there and did nothing, or helped them, by God, I'll have you tried as an adult!"

The smile had completely vanished and looked like it might never return. That was what Julian wanted. "If they weren't with you before they went to the tower, who were they with? And this had better be the truth, Jacob, 'cause I'm gonna check."

Julian watched him weigh his options, and as usual he chose self-preservation. "They were probably hangin' with some dudes over at Eleventh and Camelot. An old house on the corner. They went there sometimes when they told their folks that they were at my house. Ry had been hangin' out there a lot since you guys busted him."

"Who are these people, Jacob? What's up with them?"

Jacob considered this for a moment. "It's a girl and a dude. They're a little older than us, eighteen or nineteen, but they're cool. A little different, maybe, but cool."

Julian felt his scalp tingle. "A red-haired girl and a tall, skinny guy?"

Jacob brightened a little. "Yeah, Gabriel and Morgan, you know 'em?"

There they were again. "Yeah, I've met them. Jacob, do a lot of people know about Ryan being busted?"

"It's been around town. You know Ry could never keep his mouth shut."

Julian digested the double meaning in Jacob's statement. If Ry had blabbed about his acid bust, had he also told everyone about how the cops wanted him to be an informant? The buzzer sounded for the game to resume.

"One last thing, Jacob. What makes you think they killed themselves? Why would they do that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jacob had already started to walk away and he stopped in midstride, the towel slung over his shoulder. "You should talk to those dudes on Eleventh about that, man. All I know is that since Ry started hangin' there he's been different . . . or was different," he corrected himself. "They got a different way of lookin' at life over there. I'm not into it, but it's cool. Ry said they were teaching him not to be afraid."

"Afraid of what?" Julian asked.

"Anything, dude. Parents, cops, life, death, you know, everything."

"He said that? Even death?"

"That was the main thing he said they believed. If you didn't fear death, nothing could touch you. That there was freedom on the other side." Jacob walked away. Over his shoulder, the smile fully in place again, he called out, "Don't fear the reaper!"

Julian recognized the line from a popular rock song in which the singer urges his lover to commit suicide with him. "Bullshit," he muttered under his breath and walked away.

Two days later, Julian received a copy of the medical examiner's findings. It contained no surprises. Both deaths were ruled accidental as a result of their plummet from the water tower. Suicide was not mentioned, both as a courtesy to the families and due to the absence of suicide notes or other corroborating evidence. The serology examination revealed traces of lysergic acid diethylamide, which was listed as a possible contributing factor in the deaths.

Julian pondered that for a moment. LSD kept popping up in this case. First, he had nabbed Ryan with a sheet of acid several months ago. Second, Ryan agrees to put him on to the source of the local network. Third, Ryan, according to the possumlike Jacob, starts to hang out with the Eleventh Street couple. Fourth, Ryan and his girlfriend take a two-hundred-foot header off the local water tower and their autopsies reveal the presence of LSD in their bloodstreams. Finally, he and Shane find three sheets of blotter acid in Ryan's room.

A hundred and fifty hits was way too much for personal use. Had Ryan moved into dealing shortly before his death? Had he cut into some other dealer's territory and suffered the consequences? It seemed unlikely. Money just wasn't a motive in street-level acid dealing. It was only three to five dollars a hit, for God's sake! Acid dealers weren't like crack or heroin pushers. They weren't in it for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the money. They tended to see themselves as purveyors of an alternate lifestyle. Modern-day shamans offering their followers a glimpse of paradise . . . or hell. It was a power trip, really, with the dealer as both holder of the key and guide once you had entered the gate. Among the very young, it could be a powerful, and dangerous, position.

Ryan just didn't fit the bill. He wouldn't have had the organizational skills for such a role. He was Loopy, remember? Essentially a good-time Charlie.

There was another possibility, however. Maybe Ryan had hidden those sheets as evidence, intending to turn them over to Julian. It would be just like Ryan to go half the distance and get distracted or change his mind. But had he shot his mouth off about that as well? Whereas money might not be a motive to an acid dealer, prison certainly could be.

Julian opened the bag containing Becca's clothing and belongings, which had been sent over with the M.E.'s report, and carefully withdrew the silver ankh with its broken leather thong. He had specifically requested a DNA test be run on any flesh found adhering to the leather at the point where it had been broken. The M.E.'s office had been just as specific. In the absence of evidence of homicide and the lack of any suspects, no tests would be run. There was no way they could justify the expense and, besides, the use of DNA in forensic science simply had not yet reached a level where it was accepted as definitive by the judiciary system. At this point, the myth was a more powerful tool than the reality. There had been no mention in the report of whether the necklace had been identified by the girl's parents or not. He pulled the phone over to him and dialed their number.

Rebecca's mother did not recall ever having seen her daughter wear a necklace of that description, and it was unique enough that she would have remembered. Julian thought he knew its owner.

The house wasn't hard to find, sitting exactly where Jacob had said it would be at the corner of Eleventh Street and Camelot Avenue. It was a ramshackle Victorian monstrosity sprouting turrets and cupolas from unlikely places, a hangover from the days when the rich brought their servants with them to the shore. With three floors and an attic, there was plenty of room for everyone. Usually, the attic was where the servants ended up. They were like rabbit war-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rens, cut up into a half-dozen rooms or so. They must have been insufferably hot in the summer, Julian thought.

As Julian approached, he noticed that the paint had worn away in a number of places and that shingles were missing from both the roof and the siding. The broad wooden steps leading to the wrap-around veranda sagged under his weight and the wood looked spongy. The veranda itself sloped towards the heavy, ornate front door, reminding him of a carnival fun house where once you enter, you cannot go back. Julian glanced at the forbidding entrance, expecting to see a sign above the door that read, "Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here!"

He could see no one through the tall windows that fronted the house. The inside looked to have been better kept up than the exterior, but still had a forlorn, unkempt appearance, cluttered, dark, and dusty. Julian returned to the door and peered through the tulip-patterned etched glass framed in the woodwork. At the end of the dimly lit hall he glimpsed a shawled figure gliding silently from one room to the next. He felt his hackles rise in spite of himself. He slammed the blackened brass door-knocker several times to dispel the goose bumps. After all, this phantom had red hair.

After what seemed like a very long wait, Julian heard someone shuffling down the hallway towards the door. Gabriel's face appeared briefly in the glass and vanished. Another pause ensued and Julian wondered if he was going to open the door or not. Just as he raised the knocker again, the door swung inward a few inches. Gabriel thrust his acne-scarred face out, his long, stringy forelocks covering one eye.

"Yeah?" he ventured.

"Is it Lurch's day off?" Julian asked, straight-faced.

Gabriel seemed to consider this. "Say what?" he finally responded.

Julian didn't want to waste any more time with repartee on an unarmed opponent. "Could I come in?"

Once again, the boy seemed befuddled, unsure. Julian could see a bead of sweat run down his long, dirty-looking neck as he turned to look back into the house. His face came around again. "Um, just a minute." With that he closed the door.

Was the girl standing behind him? Did he have to consult her before allowing the police in? He's either very stupid or very nervous, Julian thought.

After another long pause, the door opened again. This time it was Morgan. She was no longer wearing the shawl and her great thatch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of orangy hair hung unbound to her waist, a mass of snarls and split ends that made her look like a flaming Medusa. Her paper-white face looked serene and confident. She began to speak, but had to stop to clear her throat. She tried again.

"How may I help you, Officer?" she asked, with just the slightest trace of peevishness.

"I'd like to talk with you inside, if I may. With you both," he added.

She seemed to consider this. The door opened all the way and she invited him in with, "Come in, if that is what you choose." Gabriel was nowhere to be seen.

"Isn't that what Dracula said to Jonathan Harker?" Julian joked. Nonetheless, this house and these people gave him the creeps.

She turned back from the parlor entrance and eyed him without a trace of humor. "I don't know what you're talking about," she replied flatly.

"You're right," said Julian. "I think it was 'Enter of your own free will.' " He had given it his best Hungarian accent.

Spots of color appeared at the girl's cheeks. Julian could see that she wasn't used to being toyed with. "You may come into this room," she said. "But no farther. The rest of the house is off-limits to you." Now it was Julian's turn to get steamed. Gabriel sat cross-legged on an antique sofa with the stuffing spilling out, watching this exchange. Julian walked on in, intentionally not replying, not acknowledging her implied control of him.

Julian smiled warmly at Gabriel. "Long time, no see, pardner!" Once again, the humor went right over the boy's head and he just looked startled. His eyes sought Morgan's. Julian decided that he would focus on the boy. The girl, who had settled herself in an upholstered, wing-backed chair, regarded them both imperiously. Julian chose not to sit and leaned back against the mildewed wallpaper. He plowed on. "Gabriel," he said overloudly, "when's the last time Ryan Louper and his girlfriend were in this house?" The eyes looked fearful now.

The girl interrupted. "Officer, this is my house. I think I have a right to know why we are being questioned and what it's about."

"This is your house? When did you buy it?" Julian asked pleasantly.

She was caught off guard at his change of direction. "Well, it's my grandfather's actually, but he's let me live here for as long as I choose." The spots of color returned.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That word again. "Choose." She seemed intentionally to avoid words like will and must. "I see. So it's not 'your' house." He let that hit home and continued. "I'm investigating the deaths of Ryan Louper and Rebecca Tournquist, a young couple you're both familiar with, I've been told. You've read about it in the paper, I assume?"

"We don't read the papers," she responded coolly. "They're full of lies, half-truths, and distortions. The real truth lies within."

Julian digested this for a moment. "Well, miss, the real truth is that two friends of yours are dead. I found them myself. You can take it from me, they're as dead as you can get." Julian could hear Gabriel breathing through his mouth now, hoarse, ragged.

Morgan glanced sternly in his direction. "What makes you think they were friends of ours? Who told you that? I'd like to know who that could be."

I just bet you would, thought Julian. "Miss, I'm just trying to determine their movements prior to the 'accident.' It's pretty routine, actually. And seeing as how you two were in the vicinity of the water tower at the time of their fall, I thought you might have seen or heard something. In fact, I thought you all might have been together that evening." He finished up looking at Gabriel, who sounded as if he might have an asthma attack at any moment.

She was standing now, rigid. "We've already told you, Officer. We didn't know them and they were never with us!" She wasn't going to give Gabriel a chance. She spoke for them both now. "We've told you all we know, which is nothing!"

"Actually," Julian cut her off, "old Gabriel here hasn't told me anything. Have you, Gabe?" He reached down and patted his knee in a friendly, confidential manner. "Maybe we'll talk later." Gabriel looked ashen and terrified. Julian noted that it wasn't he Gabriel was looking at though, it was the girl. "Mind if I use the bathroom?" he asked, seemingly oblivious to the girl's blatant hostility and the tension-laden atmosphere. "Is it down the hall here?" He walked rapidly out of the room and turned left toward the back of the house.

The girl was instantly behind him. "I want you to leave now!" she hissed.

Julian kept walking and opened the door he had seen her come out of earlier. "This it?" he called over his shoulder.

The room he was looking into was radically different from the rest of the house. It was brilliant with a kaleidoscope of light supplied by a bank of large, stained-glass windows lining the rear wall. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

furnishings consisted of mounds of cushions forming divans for reclining.

His attention, however, was captured by the inner wall, which was a pulsing mural of colors depicting a landscape of people meeting their deaths in a variety of graphic ways. Head-on collisions seemed to predominate. In each case, the person's soul was shown flying heavenwards, white-robed and rapturous, from the crushed or bleeding body. It was the end of the world and the beginning of the hereafter. Julian recognized it as a crude reproduction, with numerous liberties taken, of a frightening painting known as "The Rapture." It's like looking into her squirming little brain, Julian thought.

Morgan pushed by him and slammed the door shut in his face. "Get out!" she screamed.

"Oops, thought that might be the loo," Julian responded. He turned and started for the front door, leaving Morgan guarding her inner sanctum. Gabriel stood peering nervously into the hallway from the parlor entrance. "I'm really sorry for all the upset, Gabriel. I was just hoping to clear up this accident business and I thought you guys might be able to help. Hey, cops are people. We all screw up."

Julian stopped abreast of the boy and leaned into him conspiratorially. He removed something from his pocket and held it in his closed fingers. "Listen, Gabe, I feel awful about upsetting your girlfriend like this. Maybe this will make her feel better. I found it right after we stopped you guys on First Avenue the other night." He opened his hand and there lay the ankh.

Almost smiling with relief, Gabriel reached out for it. "Morgan's ankh!" he breathed. "She was afraid she'd never get it back. It was so dark . . ." With a gasp, he stopped in mid-sentence and snatched his hand back as if Julian were holding a scorpion. The realization of what he had said was written all over his face. Over the boy's shoulder, Julian could see the girl, who had crept silently down the hall and witnessed the exchange. Her normally pasty face was even paler and the flesh hung loose with shock. Only the tiny, muddy green eyes looked alive, glittering with malice.

Julian held the necklace up so that she could clearly see it. "Gotcha!" he said and went out the door.

Back in the car, he placed his head down on the steering wheel, trying to master his excitement and fury. On the one hand, he now knew with certainty that Morgan and Gabriel had been on that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tower with Ryan and his girlfriend on the night of their deaths. The motive, now that he had caught a glimpse of Morgan's character, was just as clear. She had known, just as Jacob and everyone else in their little circle had known, that Ryan was an informant for the police. That was why he had taken up with this odd couple in the last few months of his life. He was setting them up. But Morgan set him up first. There was no way that she could spend a day "inside." Not her. The queen of her domain, the mistress of her own fate. May, not shall.

On the other hand, Julian knew that he didn't have a shred of usable evidence. In the absence of witnesses or a confession, they would continue as if they had never stood at the top of that bloated tower looking down at those shattered young bodies. Julian thought of the mural and briefly pictured the souls of Ryan and Rebecca flying heavenwards, in terror, from the earth. He started the car and drove away.

Back at the station, a large manila envelope was waiting for him. It was the report on the latents from the state police. Almost holding his breath, Julian tore it open and read the report.

They hit the house at two in the morning with the search warrant. Julian was a great believer in visiting suspects in the wee hours, when they were at their physical and psychological low ebb. Defenses were down and truth tended to be less elusive.

The Automated Fingerprint Identification System, or AFIS, as it was more commonly called, had done the trick. Not only had it proven that the Acid Queen and her joker had handled the sheets of LSD that had been found in Ryan's room, thereby giving Julian a shot at a distribution charge, it also revealed that both had faced similar charges in the past. More importantly, they could no longer deny that they had known the dead couple.

Morgan had been smart enough to destroy any sheets they had lying around the castle after Julian's visit, but she had underestimated the cops. Something Julian had privately counted on. The chemicals for making her brew were found in various locations throughout the house. In the servants' quarters, they had found a paper perforator and a hand-operated silkscreen press. The stencil had been a dancing bear.

Morgan had been carried out screaming that she was a chemistry major. Gabriel had remained silent. Julian saw to it that they were transported separately to the station and kept that way.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Julian was sitting facing the door of the interview room when they brought Gabriel to him. He took a long moment just to look at the boy, who was shivering like someone with St. Vitus's Dance. He looked down at the floor to avoid Julian's eyes and wrapped his arms around himself. Julian, with careful enunciation, read him his Miranda warning. He nodded his head to indicate that he understood his rights. He doesn't trust himself to speak, thought Julian. So he began.

"Gabriel," Julian said softly, "there's very little I need from you in reference to the drug charges you're facing here. I think the evidence will stand alone on that pretty well. Do you understand me?"

Gabriel's teeth began to chatter, making a slight clacking sound in the concrete room. He nodded again.

"There's another reason I have you in here. I think you know what that is, don't you?"

Gabriel looked up at Julian now. His eyes wet, beseeching. Julian couldn't tell if he wanted him to stop or go on and get it over with. His hope buoyed. If ever a suspect was on the verge of breaking, this was him. . . .

"The water tower, Gabe, that's what we need to talk about." The young man began to rock back and forth now, his eyes tightly shut. "I think you can tell me what happened up there that night, can't you? I know you were there, and I think you need to tell someone. If you help me with this, I'll go to bat for you with the prosecutor. I can't make any promises, but I'll try." The tempo of the rocking increased and Julian saw that he was biting hard on his lower lip. Still nothing.

"It's the girl, Morgan, isn't it? Are you trying to protect her, Gabriel? Is that it?"

Gabriel stood suddenly, still rocking like a crazy person. Julian stood too.

"I know what happened up there wasn't your fault, Gabriel. It was her idea, but she needed you, didn't she? Because there were two of them, she needed you up there."

Without warning, Gabriel slammed his forehead into the cinder block of the wall, hard. Before Julian could get around the desk that separated them, he did it again. Julian grabbed him and spun him around. Gabriel's forehead was red and abraded, spots of blood showing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You don't understand her!" he wailed. "You don't understand her!"

"Then tell me!" Julian demanded.

They looked at each other and Julian could see the struggle in the other's face. After a moment, Gabriel simply murmured, "I can't."

Julian felt the elation of the day's events draining from his system and being replaced by a loathing for this bizarre couple that he could barely contain. He could see his chance of convicting the girl for the murders of Ryan and Rebecca falling away from him. The boy was a coward, more afraid of Morgan than the police.

"You're terrified of her, aren't you?" Julian hissed.

Something like dignity tried to make its way into Gabriel's face and failed. "We made a pact," he whispered. "We made a pact for as long as we live on this plane of existence."

Julian backed up a step, disgusted. "Get out of here, Gabriel. A medic'll take a look at your head before you go back to your cell."

Alone, with his face in his hands, Julian weighed his remaining options.

It was dawn when he had Morgan brought in. She looked exhausted but defiant. Julian knew that bail money for both of them was en route from her generous grandfather. He ignored the preliminaries, having made his decision in the quiet predawn hours. Anything that was said in this room would never end up in a court of law.

They sat staring at each other like battle-weary vets. Tired, but not vanquished. Julian knew better than to bluff that her partner had squealed on her. She would find out the truth as soon as their bail arrived. No doubt she knew her man pretty well in any case. Julian broke the silence.

"Morgan, I'm not going to detain you for long. As you know, our case against you for the manufacture and distribution of LSD is rock-solid."

"That's bullshit!" she spat out. "I'm a chemistry major and I've got the transcripts to prove it!"

Julian cut her off. "I'm sure you do. Not just any idiot can whip up a batch of acid. However, some of the chemicals you had in your possession are illegal in themselves, and taken together with your little setup upstairs, I don't think we'll have any problem proving our case."

He let her glare at him while it sank in.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Your problems go just a little deeper than that though. You've got priors. Probation won't even be an issue in your case. You will do time. Five to ten years . . . for starters."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean, starters?"

Julian noticed that her choice of words and phrasing was cruder now than in their previous meetings. She was tired, ragged. He began the lie.

"It means this." He threw the ankh onto the desktop and let it lie there between them. For the first time, he saw actual fear in her face. She looked as if she wanted to run from the room. The look was gone in a second, replaced by the roiling clouds of fury that seemed her natural state.

"Your boyfriend has already identified this as belonging to you, but I took it a step further. See where the thong is broken?" He held up the ends for her to see. "I had the prosecutor's lab take some scrapings from it for DNA analysis. It'll take a few days for the report. Then I'll be coming after you with a court order for some blood. I think you know what the results will be. How is your neck, by the way? All better?"

Like Gabriel, she stood up suddenly. Julian remained in his seat.

"You can stand, if you like, Morgan, but you 'may' not leave." She looked wildly at him. "So, you see, Morgan, that sample is going to place you at the scene—opportunity, it's called. Your fingerprints on the sheets of acid that Ryan got from you provide a motive. Motive, opportunity, and means. And the means were simple enough. You got them stoned and suggested a trip to the water tower. I imagine you guys had been up there before. It must be a great place to watch the world from when you're stoned. After they got settled, leaning over the railing and watching the world go by, you launched them. You took the girl, obviously, since we found your necklace in her hand. Gave you a bit of trouble, did she?"

"You're making all this up, you lying bastard!" she screamed.

Julian reached out and placed his hand over the ankh. "Morgan, you're going to spend the rest of your life in prison . . . following other people's orders. That'll be the hateful part for you, I imagine, no longer being in control and controlling others, but on the receiving end. That's what this has all been about, hasn't it? You lost control of Ryan, or thought you had, and he presented a threat to your little world, so you removed him . . . and the girl. Just to make sure. It wasn't murder, though. You were just sending them to the 'other side' . . . a little early, maybe. But rest assured that if anyone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

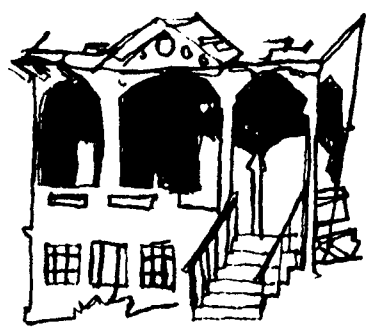
should dare to suggest the death penalty, I'll be the first to protest it, because that would be the easy way for you, wouldn't it? After all, you don't fear the reaper, do you, Morgan? Do you?"

She launched herself at him, scratching three grooves down his cheek before Shane rushed in and dragged her back to her cell. They were both released that same morning. Julian didn't have to wait long.

This time the jumpers were spotted right away, thanks to the spotlights the borough had newly placed at the bottom of the tower to illuminate the catwalk. Quite a crowd had gathered even before the police had arrived. The girl wasted little time, according to witnesses, but dove with arms spread wide, flashing briefly in the glare of the lights before vanishing into the darkness at the base of the tower.

The young man remained motionless, with his back pressed against the wall of the tank, and the giant letters CAMELOT emblazoned above his head.

He was still there when Julian arrived and found Shane trying to talk him down with a loudspeaker. Julian left his car and walked up to his perspiring partner. "Shane, when you get him down from there, bring him to me. He has something he can tell me now." With that he turned and started back for his patrol car, thinking of two young people who would never grow old and their grieving parents and wondering if his own children were asleep yet.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# NEXT ISSUE...

**12 stories—including**

**In the Bluebell Wood by JULIAN SYMONS**
**A Bequest for Mr. Nugent by JAMES POWELL**
**The Alexandrian Cat by STEVEN SAYLOR**
**Woman in a Doorway Waving by ROBERT TWOHY**


**JANET HUTCHINGS** ..... *Editor*
**TARA ANN CUDDIHY** ..... *Assistant Editor*
**JEAN TRAINA** ..... *Design Director*
**TERRI CZECZKO** ..... *Art Director*
**ANTHONY BARI** ..... *Junior Designer*
**MARILYN ROBERTS** ..... *Senior Production Manager*
**CAROLE DIXON** ..... *Production Manager*
**CYNTHIA MANSON** ..... *Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights*
**CONSTANCE SCARBOROUGH** ..... *Contracts Manager*
**BARBARA PARROTT** ..... *Director of Newsstand Circulation*
**BRUCE SCHWARTZ** ..... *Director of Circulation Subscription Sales*
**DENNIS JONES** ..... *Operations Manager Subscription Sales*
**LESLIE GUARNIERI** ..... *Renewal & Billing Manager Subscription Sales*
**FRED SABLOFF** ..... *Associate Publisher*
**JUDY DORMAN** ..... *Assistant Advertising/ Sales Manager*

**ADVERTISING OFFICES**

**NEW YORK**
**(212) 782-8562**

**ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE**
**Dresner Direct, Inc., N.Y., N.Y. (212) 889-1078**

**CHRISTOPH HAAS-HEYE**
*President and Publisher*
*Dell Magazines*

**JACK HOEFT**
*President and CEO*
*Bantam Doubleday Dell*

* * *

ELLERY QUEEN
*Editor-in-Chief*
*(1941–1982)*

ELEANOR SULLIVAN
*Editor-in-Chief*
*(1982–1991)*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 103, No. 1, Whole No. 623, January 1994. Published every 28 days which includes special issues in March and October by Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, at $2.50 a copy in the U.S.A., $3.25 in Canada. 1 year subscription $34.97 in U.S.A. and possessions, $44.97 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds (GST included in Canada). Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. *Call 800-333-3053 with questions about your subscription. Editorial and* Executive Offices, 1540 Broadway, N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 5127, Harlan, IA 51593-5127. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. Canada Post International Publications Mail, Product Sales Agreement No. 260649.


© 1993 Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.


POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 5127, Harlan, IA 51593-5127. In Canada return to 3255 Wyandotte Street East, Windsor, Ontario N8Y 1E9. ISSN: 1054-8122. Dell GST: R123054108. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. PRINTED IN U.S.A.




LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

EQ JANUARY '94

QUEEN/HITCHCOCK combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is $4.80 per word—payable in advance ($72.00 minimum). Capitalized words 60¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to Judy Dorman, DELL MAGAZINES, 1540 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036.

## AUTHORS' SERVICES

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK NOW! Your book can be published and promoted by the leading subsidy book publisher. Send for free booklet HP-5. Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

Agent interested in unpublished manuscripts, fiction. Query/Sase, Writer's Literary Service, Box 575, Exton, PA 19341.

NEW AUTHORS, publish your work. All subjects considered. Academic, Religion, Poetry, Childrens Fiction, Non-Fiction Biography. Authors Worldwide invited. Write or send your manuscript, MINERVA PRESS, London, U.D. Office, 213 W. Main Street, Washington, MO 63090.

LEARN TO PLOT MYSTERY STORIES, step-by-step guide by award-winning author. $4.00 + sase to: Plotworks, Po Box 422, North Branford, CT, 06471.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperback, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

MYSTERY ADDICTS! Free catalogue! New and Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, OH 45232, 513-242-7527.

FREE Catalogue of used and collectable detective fiction, Dunn and Powell Books, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

FREE used mysteries catalog. No Tie Required, Box 9592, Cedar Rapids, IA 52409. 319-363-7708.

25% OFF! Unlimited selection. No obligation!! Minimum order: 10 books. For information, write POB 563, Athens, GA 30603.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

FREE CATALOGS, Mystery, Hardcover, Vintage Paperbacks. Ed McDonald's Mostly Mystery, 111 Boston Avenue, Stratford, CT 06497.

NEWSLETTER for large people, selected articles on comfortable travel, improving self-esteem, product sources, latest nutritional studies, book reviews and "special" holiday receipts. Send $10 for four quarterly issues to: Newsletter, Box 573, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED, all types. Company with 70-year tradition. "Author's guide to subsidy publishing." 1-800-695-9599.

**HOW TO PUBLISH YOUR BOOK**

Join our successful authors in a complete and reliable publishing program: publicity, advertising, handsome books. Speedy, efficient service. Send for FREE manuscript report & copy of Publish Your Book.

*CARLTON PRESS Dept SMA*
*11 West 32 St., New York, 10001*

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

WE'LL PAY YOU TO TYPE NAMES AND ADDRESSES FROM HOME. $500.00 PER 1000. Call 1-900-896-1666 ($1.49 min/18 yrs. +) or Write: PASSE-XA0194, 161 S. Lincolnway, N. Aurora, IL 60542.

## CONTEST/CONFERENCE

CASH for fiction. "Sherlock Holmes, the Bennington Years, 1891-1894". Also, Holmes Conference, June, 1994. Details, Chamber of Commerce, Bennington, VT 05201.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Classified Continued



### EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28563.

### INVENTORS

RECEIVE your FREE Information Kit about PATENTING and MARKETING New product ideas. The Concept Network, Professional and Inexpensive services. 1-800-835-2246. Ext. 197, Call now!

### MANSCRIPTS WANTED

MANUSCRIPTS wanted, Publisher looking for new talent. For more information, Lrik, 374 Islip Avenue, Islip, NY 11751.

### MYSTERY CRUISE '94

6th ANNUAL MYSTERY CRUISE, April 27, 1994. Seven days on Princess Cruises to Acapulco and Mexican Riviera. For information, call Omni Group Cruises, 800-876-6664.

### PERSONAL

FREE photos! Meet pretty Mexican ladies. World, Box 7358DD, Moreno Valley, CA 92552. Call 1-800-643-7309.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP, MARRIAGE. American-Mexican-Oriental. Free Photos. Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista CA 91912 (619) 425-1716.

Nationwide introductions! Refined singles 18-80. Also, Japanese, Asian, European! Identify, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48088.

### PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship, romance & marriage with American ladies & gentlemen! All ages! Free details: English Rose Introductions, (Dept 113), Suite 2, 24, Cecil Square, Margate, Kent CT9 1BA, ENGLAND. TEL: 01144-843-290735.

TRADITIONAL ORIENTAL WIVES! Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Since 1984. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2724.

*Would you like to be one of*

## THE HAPPY FEW®?

Are you young and college-educated? Are you seriously searching for love? We offer self-descriptive essays and let you decide whom to contact. (Also open to gays.) Write to:

**The Happy Few**, Dept. SF
P.O. Box 382805
Cambridge, MA 02238

### TAPES & CASSETTES & CDs

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

**YOU'LL MAKE MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO BY READING AND ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINES

## COMBO CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to DELL MAGAZINES
Classified Advertising Department 15th Floor
1540 Broadway New York, N.Y. 10036

**15 WORD MINIMUM**
Only $72.00 for 15 Words or Less
$4.80 each additional word
Capitalized words add—60¢ per word
**SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER**

**DEADLINE:** Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the fourth preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE: _____ DATE: _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $4.80 each $ _____

_____ Capitalized word at 60¢ each

Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $

(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $72.00 × 3 months = $216.00 × .85 = $183.60)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

*(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) **$72.00** | (2) **$72.00** | (3) **$72.00** | (4) **$72.00** | (5) **$72.00** |
| (6) **$72.00** | (7) **$72.00** | (8) **$72.00** | (9) **$72.00** | (10) **$72.00** |
| (11) **$72.00** | (12) **$72.00** | (13) **$72.00** | (14) **$72.00** | (15) **$72.00** |
| (16) **$76.80** | (17) **$81.60** | (18) **$86.40** | (19) **$91.20** | (20) **$96.00** |
| (21) **$100.80** | (22) **$105.60** | (23) **$110.40** | (24) **$115.20** | (25) **$120.00** |
| (26) **$124.80** | (27) **$129.60** | (28) **$134.40** | (29) **$139.20** | (30) **$144.00** |

**HOW TO COUNT WORDS:** Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 1540 Broadway New York, New York 10036. 5 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York, 1 words. Abbreviations such as C O D, F O B, PO, U S A, 7 × 10, 35mm count as 1 word (PO Box 145 count as 3 words). Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to Dell Magazines**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY WAREHOUSE SALE!

Join us in our anthology warehouse sale with great savings! For only $12.95 (includes postage and handling), you will receive five classic Ellery Queen anthologies. Our warehouse is packed with anthologies that will provide you with hours of great reading. Act quickly.

**Please send your name and address with your check or money order to:**

**Ellery Queen**
**P.O. Box 40**
**Vernon NJ 07462**

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.
For shipping and handling outside U.S.:
Canadian orders add $4.00, foreign orders add $6.00

M7EL-0


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This holiday season give a subscription to ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. It's the perfect gift and it will be appreciated throughout the year.

Once a year holiday rates are now in effect. Your first gift subscription costs only $22 for 15 issues. Each additional gift subscription is even less-just $17 for 15 issues.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK MYSTERY MAGAZINE is also available at these low holiday rates. The first subscription costs only $22 for 15 issues; each additional subscription costs only $17 for 15 issues.

Gift recipients will begin their subscription in January, with a current issue.

We publish two double issues, per year. Each double issue counts as two towards your subscription.

Giving a gift subscription is easy.

**CALL TOLL FREE**

**1-800-333-3053**

or write to us at

**ELLERY QUEEN**

P.O. Box 5127

Harlan, IA 51593

Foreign orders please add $6.00.
Cash with order. U.S. funds only.

Y7QX-4

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

## ▼ STEP UP TO A HEALTHIER YOU

Doctors, physical trainers, and athletes agree that stair climbing is one of the best forms of aerobic exercise. You can achieve your fitness goals without the severe jarring or pounding associated with running or jogging. That's why the foldaway ExerClimb™ is the perfect piece of exercise equipment. The ExerClimb™ improves cardiovascular function, increases endurance, burns body fat, and conditions major muscle groups to tighten and tone upper body, thighs, hips, buttocks, and calves. And results can be seen with a twenty minute workout three times a week. It is quiet enough to let you exercise while watching T.V. or listening to your favorite music. The hydraulic powered ExerClimb™ features sturdy steel construction, magnum series shocks and individual tension adjustment to insure a high intensity, low impact workout. Compact and lightweight (28 lbs.) this incredible machine fits in virtually any size room. When opened for use, it measures 28"H x 27"L x 16"W. Plus, its unique foldaway feature makes carrying and storage a snap. Perfect to take along to your office, trips, or almost anywhere. Some assembly required, using only screwdriver and pliers. For all these great features, one would expect to pay much more, but the ExerClimb™ has a very trim price tag. So now there is no reason not to "step" into better shape. Ninety day warranty. **$119.98** ($15.00) #A1998.

**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL** DEPT. 014EL; P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. **30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund.**

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1991

1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED